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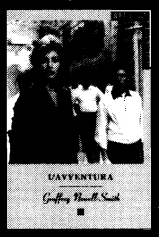

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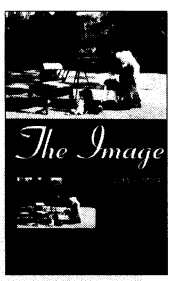

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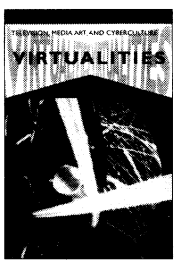

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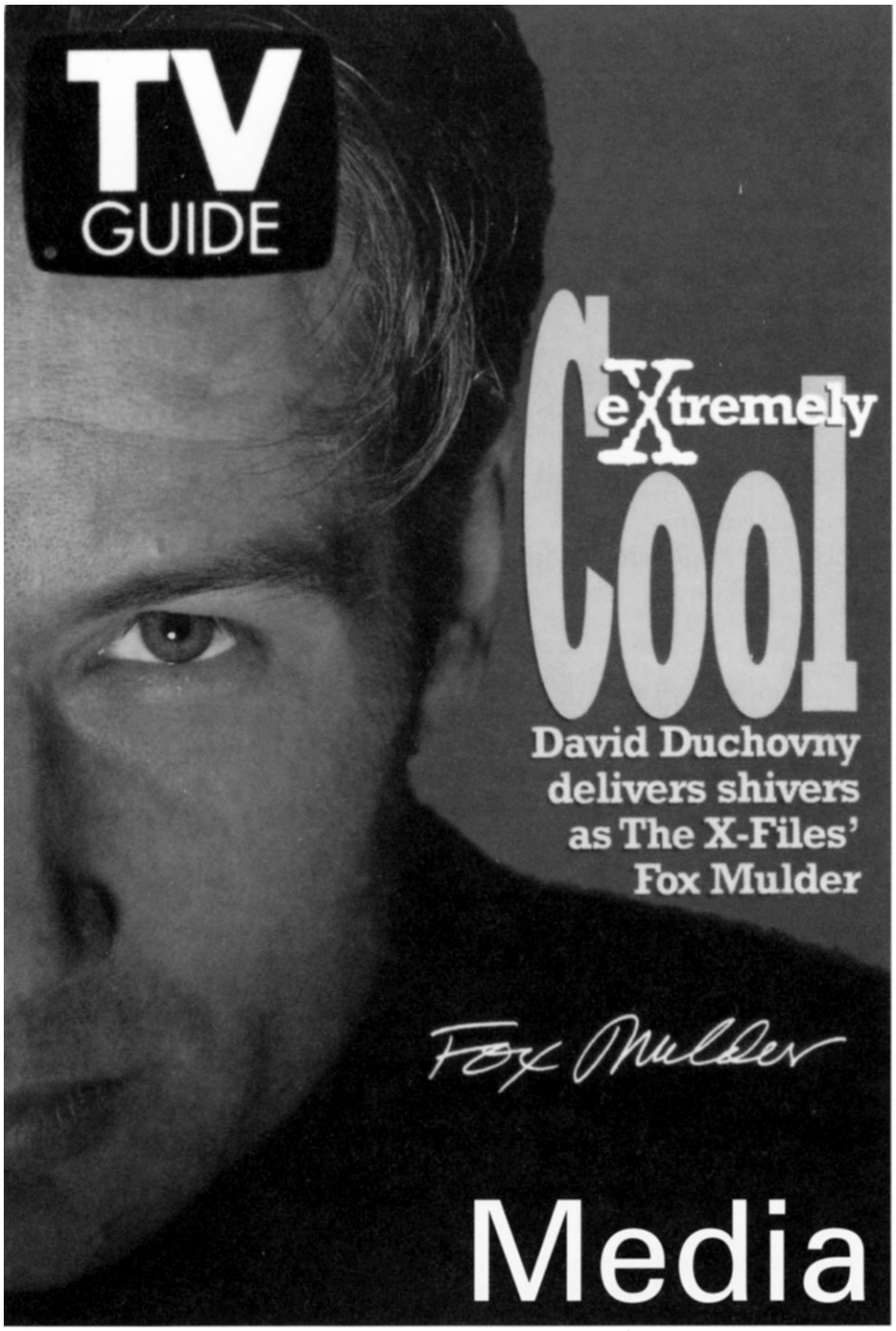


Photo © TV Guide 1996, by Greg Lavy

Adrienne L. McLean

Media Effects

Marshall McLuhan, Television Culture, and "The X-Files"

Since its premiere in 1993, the Fox network television series "The X-Files" has gone from being what *USA Today* called a "weekly creep show" with a small cult following to a lauded, respectable, and profitable prime-time drama complete with Emmys, Golden Globes, and a top-twenty audience share in the United States and some 60 foreign countries. In addition to a forthcoming movie and

assorted novelizations, guidebooks, and official and unofficial tie-in merchandise, the series—which one fan writer describes as "part police procedural, part suspense thriller, part action adventure, part medical drama, part science fiction and part horror"—has also already generated its own book-length collection of scholarly essays.[1] "The X-Files" stars previously unknown actors Gillian Anderson and David Duchovny as Dana Scully and Fox Mulder, FBI agents who have an extremely close and interesting relationship with each other—interesting (and unusual, for television) because it is strictly platonic. Each week the two labor, together and separately, to disentangle and understand what appears to be, at this writing, a giant government conspiracy involving alien/human hybridization, in which they themselves are somehow implicated.

Both the relationship and the conspiracy are the subjects of intense speculation by what *Entertainment Weekly* calls the show's "extreme, obsessed, hyperscrutinizing fan base"—or "X-Philes," as they refer to themselves on the Internet.[2] And, in turn, the fact that the X-Philes were among the first to use cyberspace to create their own virtual fan culture and specialized interest groups (there are now nearly 500 websites devoted to "The X-Files") has itself resulted in considerable journalistic and scholarly attention.[3] In short, "The X-Files" is a popular culture phenomenon because of its bizarre subject matter and genre-bending, its cult status and obsessive fans; because the relationship of its main characters departs from television's usual gender stereotypes; and because it may represent, in the words of Michele Malach, "part of a continuing cultural dialogue about law and order, freedom and safety, right and wrong, truth and falsity" during a period of PMT, or "premillennial tension."[4]

I began to ponder another side to the "The X-Files" and its popularity while teaching a course on visual culture and reading some of the recently reissued works of media critic Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980).[5] Certainly the rise and fall and rise of McLuhan's reputation might easily be written into one of the show's "the truth is out there" plot lines. Upon the publication of his second book, *Understanding Media*, in 1964, the *New York Herald Tribune* hailed McLuhan as "the most important thinker since Newton, Darwin, Freud, Einstein and Pavlov," and McLuhan's name and many of his aphorisms—"the medium is the message," "global village," "the age of information"—became part of our permanent lexicon. But what Andrew Ross refers to as McLuhan's "unremittingly formalist scheme," or his apparent refusal to treat any mass medium as a specific practice imbricated in existing and interested economic and political power structures, kept the "High Priest of Popcult and Metaphysician of Media," as *Playboy* called him in 1969, from being taken seriously by many academic scholars after the mid-1970s.[6] In 1974 Hans Magnus Enzensberger harshly dismissed McLuhan as an apolitical "charlatan" who was "incapable of any theoretical construction" and who wrote with "provocative idiocy," and Enzensberger was hardly alone in his opinion.[7] After McLuhan's death in 1980, his name and reputation, as Lewis Lapham writes, were "sent to the attic with the rest of the sensibility . . . that embodied the failed hopes of a discredited decade."[8]

The current resurgence of interest in McLuhan does seem to be driven less by an interest in his theorizing than by his apparent ability to predict the electronic future. The emergence of the Internet and its role in the formation of a new global village, and the rise of home computers, video recorders, cable and satellite networks, cellular phones, and other technologies of electronic communication and, by implication, surveillance, have given McLuhan validity as a prophet of the condition that cultural critics variously describe as postmodernism or postmodernity. What was once dismissed as typical McLuhan jeremiad is now accepted as the common denominator of our collective lives—that, as he wrote in 1967, the electronic media are "so pervasive in their personal, political,

economic, aesthetic, psychological, moral, ethical, and social consequences that they leave no part of us untouched, unaffected, unaltered."[9]

McLuhan did not only predict the future, however. He helped to chart its discursive course. In fact, his work is now being acknowledged as visionary for what scholars had heretofore dismissed with contempt as formal and theoretical faults. The aphoristic and fragmentary nature of McLuhan's discourse, its "weird and hybrid dabbling" in "scientific mysticism," as Lapham puts it, have all become familiar as a postmodern *style* of writing and, equally important, historical investigation.[10] In a climate in which historians desire to "free themselves," Robert Rosenstone claims, "from the constricting bonds of metanarratives and the Historical discipline (the way history is taught in schools),"[11] the fragmentary theorizing of McLuhan no longer seems so idiotic. Although in 1975 it made sense for Raymond Williams to declare that "as descriptions of any observable social state or tendency" McLuhan's images of society were "ludicrous," clearly this is no longer the case.[12]

My own appropriation of McLuhan to illuminate the workings of a particular television text is itself a postmodern stance, and marks me as what Anne Friedberg and others call a cultural *flâneuse*.[13] The connection that I make between McLuhan and "The X-Files" is at once arbitrary (they have nothing historically to do with one another, yet I choose to connect them) and theoretically sound (I believe that McLuhan's work on media effects does help us to understand "The X-Files" and, by implication, other popular television shows, both as representations in a precise cultural moment and as links to past television practice). This postmodern posture, however, is one which McLuhan himself regularly employed in his search to understand the effects of a media form like television on the culture which had called it into being. The aphorisms which have come down to us as McLuhan's theories were in fact actually his "probes," the "tentative statements" or "keywords" that McLuhan repeated, recast, revised, and "stretched" in order to investigate meaning. Probes are thus "drills," in the words of McLuhan biographer W. Terrence Gordon, that helped McLuhan to "blast" through what Arthur Kroker calls the "deep, invisible assumptions," the "silent structural rules" of the technology within which we are situated and which has taken us over.[14]

The point of the probes and their humor, jest, paradox, and irony is not, as Gordon points out, to "finish" the hole that the drill makes. Rather, it is what the drill "churns up" that matters.[15] Here, I use several of McLuhan's aphorisms about television culture and the effects of electronic media on our collective "sensorium"—our minds, our bodies, our nervous systems, our experience of time and space—as a set of probes with which to "pierce the crust" of "The X-Files."[16] Before drilling, however, I want to explore the general landscape of which "The X-Files" is a feature, to examine not only the show's obvious surface but the programming context into which it fits. Only then can I turn to the McLuhanesque aspects of the show, its literalization of some of his most famous speculations: that television is a cool medium which thrives on cool characters and involves the casual participation of all of the senses; that it substitutes a vague insight for a real point of view; and that it produces a collective anxiety which is dominated by a free-floating terror in which "everybody is so profoundly involved with everybody else [that] nobody can really imagine what private guilt can be anymore." In conclusion, I will address, if not completely answer, the question that people repeatedly put to me when they learn of my interest in "The X-Files": namely, whether I am for it, or against it.

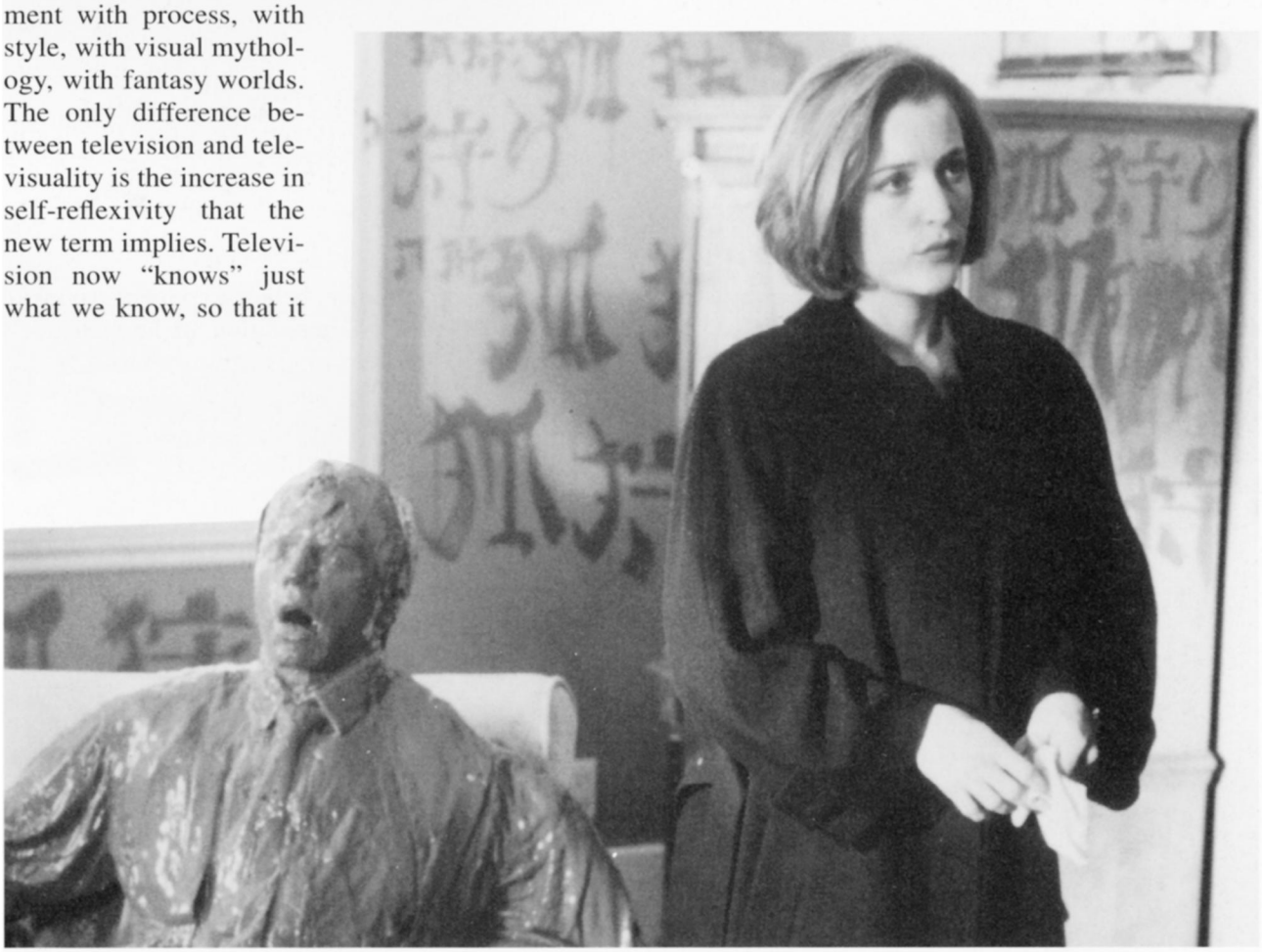
From its pilot forward, "The X-Files" has regularly featured and referred to mythology, ritual, and history ancient and modern. "The mythology" is also the official name for what series creator Chris Carter calls the "conspiracy" episodes that form the "scaffolding on which the series hangs."[17] The Lévi-Straussian dimensions of this phrase are hard to miss, as are the show's obvious pairs of binary opposites (good/evil, male/female, alien/human, belief/skepticism, spooky/normal, truth/lies, etc.). In addition, its hermeneutics of lack, loss, and need and its intermittently appearing and disappearing helpers and villains and sought-for persons make it always already folkloric in the Proppian sense as well. The question is what this self-conscious mythology, this spectacle or deployment of myth and folktale structure, obscures or plays with.

Like all television shows, "The X-Files" is polysemic and readable from what John Fiske calls "relations of subordination or opposition to the dominant meanings proposed by the text."[18] It may be that a concern with the fantastic and mythical is simply a dominant meaning of "The X-Files." But this concern marks other recent television shows as well. John Taylor Caldwell has identified a trend, a counterstrategy in American broadcast programming since the 1980s which he calls "televisuality" that not only foregrounds a "visually based mythology, framework, and aesthetic based on an extreme self-consciousness of

style" but often utilizes "self-contained and volatile narrative and fantasy worlds."[19] Televisuality is "both a pretext for economic intervention and a programming tool used to flaunt and throw around ontological distinctions: history/text, news/film, reality/fiction."[20] Televisuality employs style to attract to faltering networks the discriminating viewers who belong to the 18-to-49 demographic that is so important to advertisers. In other words, relations of subordination or opposition might easily be structured into the plot of "The X-Files" both as authorial expression and as a marketing strategy. And this would not be remarkable.

I want to suggest that Caldwell's description of televisuality bears a startling resemblance to McLuhan's claims about the hybrid nature of television and its effects on our minds and bodies. To McLuhan, television was obviously an "integral medium, forcing an interaction among components of experience which have long been separate and scattered." Through its ability to link, instantaneously, simultaneously, and nonlinearly, "anything with anything else," television restructures us into beings whose sense of the world is based on a discarnate involvement with process, with style, with visual mythology, with fantasy worlds. The only difference between television and televisuality is the increase in self-reflexivity that the new term implies. Television now "knows" just what we know, so that it often serves as a substitute for lived experience, or translates reality for us. Television's own hidden ground has become the content of the medium itself.

Here we are obviously arching towards McLuhan's most famous aphorism and foundational probe, namely that "the medium is the message." What McLuhan discovered through repeated applications of this probe is that the major effect of any medium is never its content but, instead, the "revolutionary environmental transformations" that the medium subliminally induces. That television is cool rather than hot refers to the different environmental transformations and sensory effects McLuhan associates with media of higher or lower definition. Hot media, in which he situates radio, photography, and cinema, contain relatively complete visual or aural information (they tend to "extend" one sense over others) and thus require less involvement of the user in making meaning from them. Cool media, on the other hand—the telephone, cartoons, television—supply less visual or aural information and thus require much greater sensory participation by the user.



To agree that television is a cool medium does not mean that we have to accept all of McLuhan's speculations about its neurological effects (television's sequential electronic scanning process may or may not create a "mosaic-like" tactile image that becomes "inscribed on our skins"). What matters here is McLuhan's insistence on the meaning of television's ubiquity, its usurpation of our psychic processes, and its potential to leave us in an "exhausted slump" of sensory overload. Television is at once a medium that requires audience participation and one which creates numbness and dulls our perceptions as well. This is what McLuhan describes as the "paradoxical feature of the 'cool' TV medium. It involves us in moving depth, but it does not excite, agitate or arouse."

In light of television's increasing televisuality, however, does the appellation "cool" remain useful? Does content really *not* matter in an age of cult shows, cult stars, audiences who schedule their lives around talk shows, soap operas, or "The X-Files"? Certainly television is becoming more and more like movies, fulfilling another McLuhan aphorism that all media tend to heat up over time. But this is because television, McLuhan would undoubtedly point out, has been superseded by a new "environmental" medium —the computer-linked Internet. Like print, the telegraph, the photograph, and cinema before it, television is now being reprocessed into a "harmless consumer commodity." It is no longer regarded as "corrupt or degrading" because that designation is "always reserved," McLuhan believes, for "whatever is actively environmental." At present, with television the acknowledged subliminal ground of middle-class life, the computer and the Internet are becoming the new cool media, provoking in us that psychic and social disturbance that was once created by the TV image.

It is therefore hardly surprising to find "The X-Files," like many other televisually oriented programs, often described as movie-like, or to realize that many movies scarcely signify as theatrical releases but as the television shows which, through video, they eventually become. What I am claiming, then, is also paradoxical: that even though "The X-Files" is movie-like formally and stylistically, it has chosen to remain cool in the McLuhanesque sense.[21] "The X-Files" literalizes coolness, making what Arthur Kroker calls the "inner, structural code of the technological experience" an element of its content as well as its electronic form.[22] When we drill into "The X-Files," it is our lives under television that get churned to the surface.

One of the best-known features of "The X-Files" is the degree of audience involvement and participation that the show's elliptical yet serial narrative structure fosters. The first McLuhan probe I employed, therefore, is that the "cool TV medium promotes depth structures in art and entertainment alike, and creates audience involvement in depth as well." By withholding plot and character information from audiences for weeks or even months at a time, slowly doling out pieces to a puzzle that grows larger with each episode, "The X-Files" forces depth participation to the surface. The murky visual design of the show, its strange colors and expressionist lighting, also force us to participate in creating sense from what we often cannot actually see.

Nor is understanding made easy by the language of "The X-Files," which is frequently itself aphoristic—e.g., "The truth is out there," "Believe the lies," "I want to believe," "All lies lead to the truth." One of the reasons McLuhan chose aphorism as his favored means of expression is that aphorism—like television—is by nature incomplete. Aphorism requires "participation on the part of the person regarding it or thinking about it," and is therefore the language, he believes, of teaching. What does "The X-Files" teach? The show obviously aims to "deeply involve [us] in the process of learning, illustrating graphically the complex interplay of people and events, the development of forms, the multileveled interrelationships between and among such arbitrarily segregated subjects as biology, geography, mathematics, anthropology, history, literature and languages." Yet this last quotation refers to McLuhan's vision for the role of television in the classroom. What does it mean that we can have this vision fulfilled by a prime-time creep show?

When I first encountered "The X-Files," I was greatly upset by its violence. People and animals were killed all the time, and they tended to be graphically scarified in the process. But I quickly became acclimated to the violence because "The X-Files" does consistently involve us, through its thematics of investigation, in making "multileveled" connections between "arbitrarily segregated subjects." On "The X-Files" one learns what standing inside an eviscerated elephant is like, what the Coriolis force is, how a succubus or a wraith is supposed to behave, how long it would take a python to digest a human, what escalating serial fetishism is, how cows look when they've been struck by lightning. One learns what happens to human flesh when you boil it, crush it, embalm it alive, freeze it, irradiate it, slice it with a razor blade, burn it, mutate it. Yet the visual depiction of these things seldom stirs up more than a faint, brief, queasi-

ness, because it is the appeal of knowledge and process that involves us more than the imagined effects of violence on actual human or inhuman organisms. "The X-Files" literalizes McLuhan's suggestion that not only "deeper, but further, into all knowledge has become the normal popular demand since TV." Like television itself, "The X-Files" "compells commitment and participation, quite regardless of any point of view."

The McLuhan probe which best explains how "The X-Files" can at once create knowledge in depth and fail to produce a coherent point of view comprises two remarks. The first is that the cool medium of television rewards "spontaneous casualness" and "compatible coolness and indifference" in its actors (which also allow the viewer to "fill in the gaps with his [or her] own personal identification"); the second that the "cooling system" of television often "brings on a lifelong state of psychic rigor mortis, or of somnambulism, particularly observable in periods of new technology." The manner in which the two protagonists of "The X-Files," Scully/Anderson and Mulder/Duchovny, embody each of these aphorisms has been the subject of a striking amount of fan and audience discourse. Because Anderson and Duchovny became stars by being Scully and Mulder, they also literalize McLuhan's statement that fans of television prefer to think about and relate to TV stars *as* their roles, rather than as "real people."

Clearly the boundaries between forms of fan discourse are much more fluid now than they were when McLuhan was writing, but it is hard to imagine Scully and Mulder played by well-known actors with preexisting or well-defined and filled-in extratextual identities. In fact, "The X-Files" encourages role/performer confusion by using what *Entertainment Weekly* calls a "Who-*is*-that-guy" casting strategy.[23] But even though the show openly foregrounds its own coolness (as when Mulder wonders whether he can get something disgusting off his fingers "without betraying [his] cool exterior"), does this mean that Mulder and Scully are cool in the McLuhanesque sense? Absolutely, indeed programmatically.

The comments of reviewers are useful in this regard. *The Village Voice* remarked early on Duchovny's "wonderful deadpan poise," and *Gentlemen's Quarterly* the fact that he is "as murky as swamp water."[24] *Entertainment Weekly* admires Anderson's "open, blank stare" and Duchovny's "pin-eyed zombie cool," *The New Yorker* the show's "deadpan aplomb in the face of man-size flukes and alien fetuses."[25] Although at this point we might claim any number of other antecedents for an intense but low-key or unemotional acting style—film noir, Method acting, particular star images—the obvious influence would seem to be television itself, which changed adolescence from what McLuhan called a "time of fresh, eager, and expressive countenances" to one in which the "child of the TV age" sports a "dead and sculptural pan." In short, one of the ways that we adjust to the violence of "The X-Files" is by acquiring what Scully and Mulder have, the "casual and cool nonchalance of the playful and superior being," and incorporating their viewing strategy, their attitude of grave indifference toward virtually all that they encounter, as our own. Whether confronted with horrific and graphically presented brutality, paranormal threats, family crises, or good news, Scully and Mulder exhibit the somnambulism and numbness that television invokes in all of us. When I watch them, I too become numb. As does reviewer James Wolcott, in whom "The X-Files" induces "a lush, becalmed spirit of voyeurism so pure and intent that it borders on a trance state."[26]

The third probe, which speaks to television's paradoxical alliance of numbness and participation, is McLuhan's characterization of the technological present as a new Age of Anxiety. Unlike modernist anxiety, in which the individual and his or her own interior are alienated from society, McLuhan's "anxiety of indifference" is generated by what Glenn Willmott calls the "denial (or penetration by the media, and so by everyone else) of any margins of solitude or alienation."[27] This loss of margins leads inevitably, McLuhan believes, to a perpetual—and perpetually doomed, in a media-driven environment—"questing for lost identity." Do "the hermeneutics of faith practiced by Mulder and the hermeneutics of suspicion practiced by Scully" provide, therefore, what Jimmie L. Reeves, Mark C. Rodgers, and Michael Epstein call a "bifocal outlook on unexplained phenomenon that is characterized by a sincerity that stands in stark contrast to the mockeries" of "Twin Peaks," "Beavis and Butthead," and others?[28] Or is the "quest for *anything*," as McLuhan puts it, including knowledge-seeking itself, undertaken because it is the only pure thrill left?

The quests that engage Scully and Mulder on "The X-Files" are intensely focused on foundational identity issues: the meaning of family socially and individually; of where and how one belongs in the world in an existential sense. A number of episodes, for example, center on Scully's search for who or what killed her sister, for the approval of her father, the identity of whoever abducted her for a month and

stole her ability to bear children, whoever gave her (and then cured) her terminal cancer. Mulder seeks his abducted sister and the rogue FBI agent who may have killed his father (even as questions are raised about who his father actually is). So ritualized and Freudian is this focus on family relationships that it seems linked to the extreme potency with which these issues are charged in melodrama. The omnipresence of music on "The X-Files," the way it is used to create mood and mark climaxes, also suggests an affinity with melodrama.

Yet on "The X-Files," families scarcely matter except as plot devices. Although Scully's family is said to be important to her, there is little emotional affect in her relationship to its members. Her family obviously bores her, and she them. While Mulder is supposed to be searching for his sister, finding her (which he has done now several times) does not alter his cool demeanor, nor does it deter him from doggedly pursuing the truth. The most important relationship on "The X-Files," the only one which *does* carry emotional weight, is the relationship between Mulder and Scully themselves.

Under its surface mythology of conspiracies and shadow governments, aliens and monstrosity, or even what Rhonda Wilcox and J. P. Williams call "liminality and gender pleasure," "The X-Files" and its popularity can be read as literalizing the ways in which our lives and relationships have been changed by television.[29] What is often perceived as the "lack" in the relationship of Scully and Mulder—its sexual and legal component—makes sense, then, in McLuhanesque terms. Scully and Mulder cannot be joined sexually or legally because they are both literally and figuratively alienated, penetrated, and probed to the molecular level by omniscient and omnipotent forces who have infiltrated, like television and, now, computers, virtually everything in our lives. In other words, were they to become lovers, they would cease to signify this and would instead become conventional representatives of what Kroker characterizes as the "imposed assumptions" of an outmoded set of social relations.

Scully and Mulder trust each other, and they trust what they do. Yet virtually everything they think they know is wrong. Television has taught them the arts of insight, but not how to formulate a point of view. It has sent them on a quest for identity, but taught them also never to trust what they find as a result of it. The media-driven milieu of "The X-Files" suggests that the whole world is now the same place, all of it accessible, all of it at once safe, dangerous, restricting, liberating. The North Pole is no more or less threatening than the New Jersey woods or a cheap motel room. A shopping mall, home, office building, or computer may harbor a mutant or alien; a kindly doctor or schoolteacher may inject you with a lethal virus; someone who looks like your sister or like your partner may turn out to be a shape-shifter or a clone. The psychic and physical collide in flashbacks that lie, in point-of-view shots that turn out to be "wrong," in montage sequences that link events "incorrectly." We cannot believe what we see on television, what we download from computers, what we hear on our cell phones. And yet just as Scully and Mulder believe in their relationship to each other and that there is truth *somewhere*, we do believe, all the time. We *have* to believe in the reality of *something*, even if that something is the paranoia induced by television itself.

In "The X-Files," the extent to which we see, feel, and experience everything through technology, through literal "mediation," is what McLuhan's probes churn into a vortex of simultaneous paranoia, humor, and comfort. Paranoia is the only emotional tone that makes sense in a world in which we have let television and computers become substitutes for our nervous systems and our bodies. Yet because the paranoia is free-floating, as McLuhan points out, originating in media which are "both inside and outside," it is also soothing. If, as "The X-Files" suggests, aliens and mutants are everywhere, one need not worry about them. Since an invisible shadow government controls everything from baseball to the media to our national destiny, real paranoia (much less political action) would be beside the point. Even terminal illness and death are rarely more than temporary plot divagations.[30] Does this represent what Reeves, Rodgers, and Epstein call a "reinvigoration of consensus culture and a renunciation of the excesses and exclusions of postmodernism"?[31] Does "The X-Files" really acknowledge and affirm what its mythology overtly declares *should* matter to us—the ineffable, the spiritual, the other—or is it a televisual display of ideological virtuosity, the shape-shifting of its mutants and aliens no less and no more difficult than the easy mutability it posits among the markers of gender, race, nationality, or mortality?

The reason I am still *for* "The X-Files" is that it elicits so many passionate yet wildly variable reactions, that it has no strong consensus response. The most beneficent interpretation of the show would be that, through its foregrounding of coolness and style, it helps us achieve what McLuhan calls a consciousness of the "revolutionary transformations caused by new media," thus giving us the means by which to "anticipate and control them" rather than being their slaves. Its Internet communities, though relatively exclusive in terms of educational, financial, and leisure resources, also bespeak a need for real connection, a connection which often extends beyond membership in the Gillian Anderson Testosterone Brigade or the Smart Young X-Philes. McLuhan would undoubtedly approve of the fact that one elementary school teacher uses the popularity of "The X-Files" among her students to get them interested in real science, but he would also agree with the scientist who fulminates against the show for being "pernicious because week after week it promotes the idea that a supernatural explanation should be favored over a rational one."[32]

What I am against in the show, however, is also its coolness, its blankness, its humor in the face of any and all killing, its increasing "flaunting of ontological distinctions" involving politics, power, and mortality.[33] What "The X-Files" and its popularity suggest is that we would all like to be like Mulder and like Scully, that we all want *not* to be excited, agitated, or aroused by everything we see and experience, and certainly not by everything that we see and experience on television. We, too, would like to be able to "cool off" what McLuhan calls the "hot situations of actual life" by "miming" them with humor and play.[34] Yet, as Kroker writes, for McLuhan television was a new technological sensorium, an "artificial amplification, and transferral, of human consciousness and sensory organs to the technical apparatus, which now, having achieved the electronic phase of 'simultaneity' and 'instantaneous scope,' returns to take its due on the human body."[35] A show that repeatedly foregrounds this process, whether consciously or inadvertently, might easily appear, as "The X-Files" does to so many, to be a whole new form of television.

The literal conjunctions of "The X-Files" and McLuhan's probes into the environmental effects of television form what I have argued to be the show's own invisible assumptions. "The X-Files" and its worldwide following represent, indeed embody, a McLuhanesque view of the changing nature of meaning itself in a media-driven universe. Created by a California surfer out of the bits and pieces of his own mass-mediated past, "The X-Files" is meant, Chris Carter claims, to scare us.[36] The truly frightening thing may be that we have already reached the state of psychic rigor mortis that McLuhan predicted television would eventually induce. Yet McLuhan also observed that television seemed to prompt in its audience "a strong drive toward religious experience with rich liturgical overtones," and this "The X-Files" supports as well. In the end, both Marshall McLuhan and "The X-Files" are concerned with the decay of meaning in our lives, and both urge us to create for ourselves what we may no longer be able to find.

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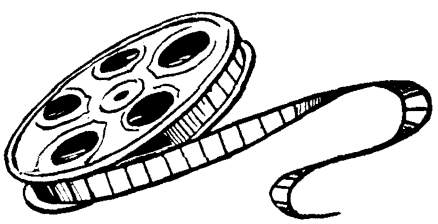
Notes

1. The quotation is on p. 2 of the anthology (David Lavery, Angela Hague, and Marla Cartwright, eds., *Deny All Knowledge: Reading* The X Files [Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1996]).
2. *Entertainment Weekly* (29 November, 1996), p. 38.
3. See, for example, Jimmie L. Reeves, Mark C. Rodgers, and Michael Epstein, "Rewriting Popularity: The Cult *Files*," pp. 22-35, and Susan J. Clerc, "DDEB, GATB, MPPB, and Ratboy: *The X-Files*' Media Fandom, Online and Off," pp. 36-51, in Lavery, Hague, and Cartwright, op. cit.
4. In Lavery, Hague, and Cartwright, op. cit., p. 20. The "PMT" is from "We All Love X. But Why?," *New Statesman and Society* (23 August, 1996), p. 26.
5. Among them Eric McLuhan and Frank Zingrone, eds., *Essential McLuhan* (New York: Basic Books, 1995); Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* [1964] (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996); Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium Is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects* [1967] (San Francisco: Hardwired, 1996). All of these have been reprinted in several foreign languages as well. Recent books about McLuhan include Glenn Willmott, *McLuhan, or Modernism in Reverse* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996); Paul Benedetti and Nancy DeHart, eds., *On McLuhan: Forward Through the Rearview Mirror* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997); W. Terrence Gordon, *Marshall McLuhan: Escape into Understanding, A Biography* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).
6. Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 114. The *Playboy* quote is in McLuhan and Zingrone, *Essential McLuhan*, p. 233.
7. Hans Magnus Enzensberger, "Constituents of a Theory of the Media" [1974], in John C. Hanhardt, ed., *Video Culture: A Critical Investigation* (New York: Visual Studies Workshop, 1986), pp. 114-115. For summaries of the academic reaction to McLuhan during his lifetime, see Ross, *No Respect*, and Gordon, *Marshall McLuhan.*
8. Lewis Lapham, introduction to McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, p. xi.
9. From *The Medium Is the Massage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1967), p. 26. Unless otherwise noted, all other quoted McLuhan aphorisms are taken either from McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, or McLuhan and Zingrone, *Essential McLuhan.*
10. Lapham, in McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, p. xiii.
11. Robert A. Rosenstone, "The Future of the Past: Film and the Beginnings of Postmodern History," in Vivian Sobchack, ed., *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television, and the Modern Event* (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 215.
12. Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* [1975] (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 128.
13. See Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993). McLuhan's "hybrid dabbling," of course, obviously makes him a *flâneur* as well.
14. Gordon, *Marshall McLuhan*, pp. 105, 179, 302; Arthur Kroker, *Technology and the Canadian Mind: Innis/ McLuhan/Grant* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984), p. 55.
15. Gordon, op. cit., p. 302.
16. Ibid.
17. *Entertainment Weekly* (29 November, 1996), pp. 38-39.
18. John Fiske, *Television Culture* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 93. See also his "Television: Polysemy and Popularity," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 3 (December 1986), pp. 391-408.
19. John Thornton Caldwell, *Televisuality: Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1995), pp. 4, 261. For more on the aggressively eclectic style of one of the best-known precursors to "The X-Files," David Lynch's "Twin Peaks," see also Jim Collins, "Postmodernism and Television," in Robert C. Allen, ed., *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled: Television and Contemporary Criticism*, 2nd ed. (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), pp. 327-349.
20. Caldwell, op. cit., p. 233.
21. For more on the forthcoming movie version of "The X-Files," whose plot, stars, writers, and production personnel are virtually all connected with the television show but "much bigger," see James Sterngold, "'X-Files' Looks for the Room to Stretch Out," *New York Times* (21 September, 1997), pp. 9, 14.
22. Kroker, op. cit., p. 17.
23. Mike Flaherty, "Unseen Forces," *Entertainment Weekly* (29 November, 1996), p. 50.
24. Erik Davis, "Earth's Most Wanted," *Village Voice* (26 October, 1993), pp. 49-50; Allison Glock, "Darkman," *Gentlemen's Quarterly* (January 1997), p. 94.
25. Ken Tucker, "Spooky Kind of Love," *Entertainment Weekly* (29 November, 1996), p. 36; *Entertainment Weekly* (24 October, 1997), p. 42; James Wolcott, "Too Much Pulp," *The New Yorker* (6 January, 1997), p. 76.
26. Wolcott, op. cit., p. 76.
27. Willmott, op. cit., p. 170.
28. Reeves, Rodgers, and Epstein, op. cit., p. 35.
29. For contrasting discussions of the representation of gender in "The X-Files," see Rhonda Wilcox and J. P. Williams, "'What Do You Think?' *The X-Files*, Liminality, and Gender Pleasure," pp. 99-120; Lisa Parks, "Special Agent or Monstrosity? Finding the Feminine in *The X-Files*," pp. 121-134; Linda Badley, "The Rebirth of the Clinic: The Body as Alien in *The X-Files*," pp. 148-167; Elizabeth Kubek, "'You Only Expose Your Father': The Imaginary, Voyeurism, and the Symbolic Order in *The X-Files*," pp. 168-204, in Lavery, Hague, and Cartwright, *Deny All Knowledge*. Of course, television watching, "normal" or otherwise, has itself been featured in "X-Files" episodes, along with computers and other forms of electronic technology. A McLuhanesque detail of the show is its reliance on cellular phones: "'I don't think you could have done this series before cell phones,' says Chris Carter. 'We can have [Scully and Mulder] in two different places yet very connected'" (*TV Guide* [17-23 May, 1997], pp. 26, 28).
30. To paraphrase James Wolcott, nobody really dies on "The X-Files"; they may at any time be hybridized, reincarnated, regenerated, cloned, and so on (in Badley, "Rebirth

of the Clinic," p. 164). During the 1996-97 season, Scully was given a terminal metastasizing brain tumor that was later cured by a computer chip that Mulder found in a government file drawer, and Mulder himself appeared to commit suicide during the season finale. The ideological implications of making these issues so mutable remain to be addressed.

31. Reeves, Rodgers, and Epstein, "Rewriting Popularity," p. 35.
32. James Williams, "Undercover Work," *Times Educational Supplement* (3 January, 1997), p. III; "We All Love X. But Why?" See also C. Eugene Emery, Jr., "Paranormal and Paranoid Intermingle on Fox TV's 'X-Files,'" *Skeptical Inquirer* (March/April 1995), pp. 18-19, and William Evans, "Science and Reason in Film and Television," *Skeptical Inquirer* (January/February 1996), pp. 45-48, 58. The *Skeptical Inquirer* loves to point out errors in the "science" of "The X-Files," such as that its description of the Coriolis force was not only backwards but applied to the wrong phenomenon entirely.
33. As Wolcott puts it, "the nadir was reached" during the 1996-97 season "in an episode where a trio of backwoods mutations savagely beat a black couple to death to the ironic strains of a Johnny Mathis tune" ("Too Much Pulp," p. 76). The show has also begun to incorporate more and more archival documentary footage into its fictional storylines, and to cull plots from topical news and events.
34. The relative lack of popularity of another Chris Carter series, "Millennium," which began to run on Fox in 1996, is interesting by comparison to "The X-Files." "Millennium" tends to *lecture* to its audiences rather than creating a sense of what McLuhan calls "do-it-yourself-ness and depth involvement"; its single star, Lance Henriksen, not only has an appearance which "strongly declares his role and status in life" (and hence is "wrong" for television) but possesses very little "spontaneous casualness"; and it desperately needs "humor and play." Or, it could be that "Millennium" is, like "Twin Peaks" did, simply "drown[ing] in the puddle of its own drippy artiness" (Jonathan Ross, "Talking with Aliens," *Sight and Sound* [June 1995], p. 61).
35. Kroker, op. cit., p. 72.
36. Chris Carter regularly calls himself a California surfer in the popular press. Besides "Twin Peaks" and all of David Lynch's films, Carter cites as influences on "The X-Files" the television shows "Twilight Zone," "Kolchak: The Night Stalker," "The Avengers," "The Untouchables," the PBS series "Prime Suspect," and the films *Silence of the Lambs*, *All the President's Men*, *Alien* and *Aliens*, and anything by David Cronenberg.



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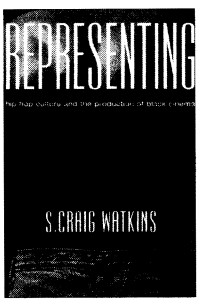

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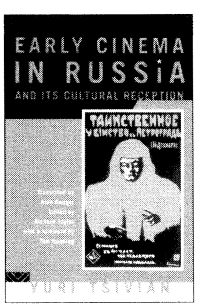

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J. P. Telotte

Rounding Up *The Usual Suspects*

The Comforts of Character and Neo-Noir

Character is an abstraction, an inorganic fixation resulting from the conceptualizing powers of man's intelligence; it is a man's idea of himself. As such it is his base of intellectually comforting certainty in the flux of all that changes in and between man.

—W. R. Robinson[1]

They've got my whole life in here.

—Fenster, *The Usual Suspects*

In this piece I want to examine the generally "comforting" nature of movie characters in order to bring into sharper focus some of the changes being wrought in the new wave of films noir, or "neo-noir" as they are being termed. More specifically, my concern here is with the emergence of a type of characterization that marks the recent resurgence of this form, a use of character that we find foregrounded in a film like *The Usual Suspects* (1995). In fact, it is a film whose narrative turns on a dynamic tension between different conceptions of character, and one that pointedly denies us that sense of comfort Robinson identifies in many classical narratives. To effect this examination, I want to draw upon two ultimately complementary assessments of film character, one the "historical poetics" of David Bordwell, and the other the process-oriented

Left: Hockney (Kevin Pollak), McManus (Stephen Baldwin), Fenster (Benicio Del Toro), Keaton (Gabriel Byrne), and "Verbal" (Kevin Spacey) run the gamut of height and attitude.

phenomenology exemplified in the work of Vivian Sobchack, W. R. Robinson, and others, for, taken together, these two vantages can help us situate this key development of the neo-noir.

I want to begin with Bordwell not just because his work represents one of the most influential currents in mainstream film criticism, but because, in his ongoing effort at crafting a historical poetics of the cinema, he has offered the most rigorous and revealing description of the various strategies that together comprise the practice of classical narrative. That approach, however, has led him to a rather conservative view of the film noir. While he describes this film type in its peak period of 1940-1957 as a "deeply problematic" form, he also finds, upon close examination, that it "no more subverts the classical film than crime fiction undercuts the orthodox novel."[2] For all of its admitted "psychological ambiguity and abnormal mental states," despite its many treacherous black widows, shell-shocked war veterans, drifters with lost memories, and "gun crazy" killers, the form's characters, he argues, were always "strongly motivated," fully in line with "current conceptions of realism."[3]

That assessment largely follows from a broader effort at sketching a normative view of the various elements of classical narrative practice, among them character and what Robinson terms its "comforting" effects. That element is one Bordwell wants especially to frame as homogeneous, since he sees character as the key to narrative logic; as he puts it, "character-centered—i.e., personal or psychological—causality is the armature of the classical story."[4] Since a single central character typically functions as the narrative's "prime causal agent," "he or she must be defined as a bundle of qualities or traits" which are consistent and constantly reaffirmed by a pattern of externalized effects, such as speech, mannerisms, and physical actions—the marks of character. These effects in turn sketch a pattern of desire or goal directedness that drives the narrative, that gives it motivation and coherence, and that conveys our conventional sense of the rounded character. While he admits that at times this practice produces types who seem somewhat ambiguous or unpredictable—as is so often the case in noir—Bordwell views them as "anomalies," as inconsistencies that, in the Hollywood tradition of "concealed artistry," individually serve to support the "transparent" reality of the world the film materializes—and by implication, the cultural patterns classical practice mirrors.[5] This systematic and formalistic—if ultimately rather monolithic—view allows the critic to submerge any "patterns of nonconformity" in a surface of "realistic and generic motivation,"[6] as difference becomes less important than a discernible pattern of sameness that points toward the dominant ideology supported by classical practice.

For what I would offer as a complement to this non-differentiating view, as a way of addressing seeming anomalies with which noir has *always* been rife and which have increasingly been foregrounded in its contemporary formations, I want to turn to a more phenomenologically oriented approach, one that might help us focus precisely on a differentiating confrontation with specific visual texts. While both Sobchack in her monumental study of the film experience and Robinson in a pioneering series of articles

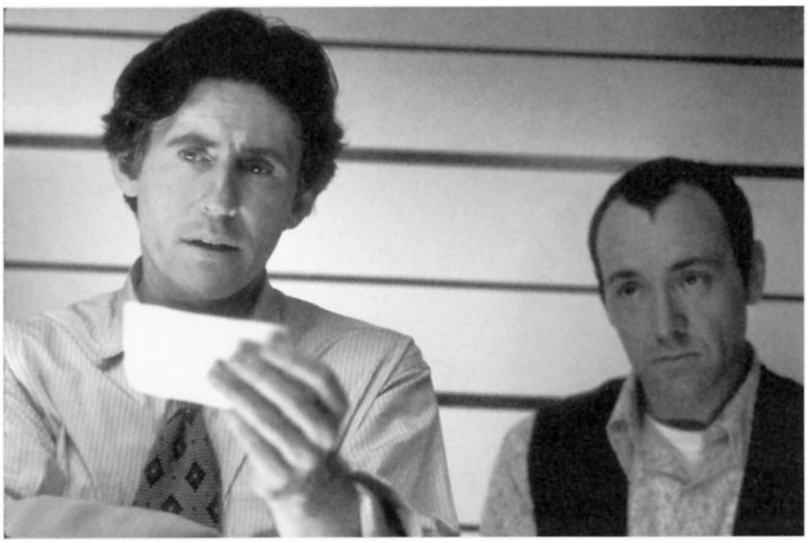
on the visual experience of film are concerned with addressing dominant film practice, they do so less to further trace out that determining force, ruling cinematic narrative, than to return it to what Sobchack terms the "social ground of our lived-body situation,"[7] or, in Robinson's words, to underscore film's potential as "a revolutionary moral force,"[8] a conveyor of value, a site of difference. Thus both consistently emphasize the effects of such practices, our experience of movie narrative, how the movies confront—or fail to confront—their viewers with stories that might reveal "the scope, complexity, and subtlety of life."[9] Difference, then, is precisely their central concern: the difference between the visual emphasis of movie narrative and older, word-based forms[10]; the difference in the ways movies work to achieve their potential; and the difference they might make, as they literally "open our eyes to value"[11] or reaffirm the "embodied significance of being"[12] by helping us to see our world and ourselves.

All these senses of difference are bound up in a particular conception of character. The classical novel typically conceives its characters in much the way Bordwell describes them, as rounded, as fully fleshed out, as seemingly having a life of their own. That life is, of course, measured in terms of the status quo, in the context of a kind of conventionalized, word-bound realism. In practice, such figures are actually just a set of specific marks, an illustrated pattern of abstract "character"-istics, a site of predictability that draws on cultural—and narrative—expectations. The movie character, on the other hand, because it is based in the visual image with its immediate sensory impact, because it so immediately evokes life itself and thus instantly argues for its own existence, or as Sobchack, paraphrasing Maurice Merleau-Ponty, argues, because it seems to be "life expressing life . . . experience expressing experience,"[13] appears more as an event, an enactment of human possibility, and thus as a source of value that speaks directly to us. What both Sobchack and Robinson call attention to is the extent to which movies have always enacted this possibility, forcing us to look beyond the status quo and releasing a kind of natural subversive power that is at least potential in even their most conventional forms, including the practices of classical narrative. The movie character thus always holds the possibility of literally making a difference, denying us the comfort of projection into a rational, psychologically driven, goal-oriented figure that has been seen as the norm in American narrative film in favor of confronting us with a figure who embodies "the flux of all that changes in and between man."[14] In that way, our encounter with the movie figure implicitly carries a subversive message, the possibility that we might see ourselves differently, less as abstract beings inhabiting an abstract world than as humans living in our world. Classical narrative deploys its conventions in a way that covers this possibility, denies difference.

If we take these different approaches to character as an access point to the film noir, especially as it has in recent years been resuscitated as neo-noir, we might make better sense of those anomalous instances Bordwell notes and establish a key line of development from those instances to current noir. Certainly, film noir has always provided us with a host of characters who seem to challenge our expectations, whose motivations are far from transparent, whose desires seem to cut across the grain of the status quo—hence the many figures who are haunted by nightmare or trauma (e.g., *Nightmare* [1956] or *The Dark Past* [1948]); who cannot contain their desires (e.g., *Double Indemnity* [1944] or *The Postman Always Rings Twice* [1946]); who, thanks to a sudden and inexplicable memory loss, seem to have no past or sense of themselves (e.g., *The Big Frame* [1953] or *The Long Wait* [1954]); or who, when measured by the yardstick of a rational norm, simply seem crazy (e.g., *Possessed* [1947] or *Gun Crazy* [1950]). The conventional perspective suggests, though, that such characters still largely function within a broad classical pattern, their anomalous characters predictably producing anomalous actions which ultimately sketch the boundaries of the status quo and even reinforce those boundaries. They are simply warnings, not carriers of value.

While this nondifferentiating view requires considerable stretching to account for some of the most troubling characters in the noir pantheon and overlooks the extent to which noir itself represented a turn from classical narrative restrictions—a turn that anticipates certain postmodern attitudes to character and indeed, more than any other popular genre, suggests the very trajectory of postmodernism—it does provide us with a useful background against which to see such recent films as *Reservoir Dogs* (1989), *Romeo Is Bleeding* (1993), *The Last Seduction* (1993), *Pulp Fiction* (1995), *L.A. Confidential* (1997), and especially *The Usual Suspects*. For here are films in which characters are anything but comforting, and for the most part anything but knowable, films that enact the promise of character sketched in noir's earlier phase. More specifically, these are films wherein the nature of character consistently becomes the key issue.

In *Reservoir Dogs*, for instance, the central figures



Keaton (left) takes his turn reading aloud in a police lineup while Verbal waits his turn.

are supposed to remain unknown to one another, and hence are identified only by the colors they adopt as aliases—colors that become simply mocking points of reference in light of the similar black-and-white outfits they all wear. *Romeo Is Bleeding* is a first-person flashback narrative told by a character who misidentifies himself from the start, as he apparently now stands at some distance from his real self and tries to better understand how he has come to his current pass, how he has, in effect, lost his identity and become simply a generic "Romeo." Bridget of *The Last Seduction* seems to so embody desire ("seduction") that the film's protagonist finds he can never quite locate anything in her that he, in his conventional, small-town way, can recognize as "character"; but indeed, the very mystery surrounding her nature seems a key to her seductive lure, as she represents the very antithesis to his staid, stable, all-too-well-known identity.

In *Pulp Fiction*, we watch Vincent and Jules, two hitmen who have to "get in character" before each job. As part of that character, Jules repeatedly spouts a Biblical passage whose meaning, he finally admits, was never as important as the impression of him it gave to his victims. Essentially, character is simply something he constructs for effect. And in *L.A. Confidential*, character is merely the construct that every figure projects—or is suspected of projecting—and power is measured in each figure's ability to sustain that projection while seeing through others'. In every instance, the narrative foregrounds our traditional, comforting sense of character, draws upon what we expect, but then, in a fashion that has become familiar from a host of postmodern narratives, mocks that notion with figures who, disconcertingly, simply "are," who underscore their sense of difference, and who, in their ability to move beyond the boundaries of roundedness—just as Jules abandons his well-rehearsed, linguistically defined character at the end of *Pulp Fiction*—add a new dimension to the cultural challenge that has always abided in the film noir.

With the recent *The Usual Suspects*, character, as well as the ways in which we approach or think of character, clearly becomes a central issue. Of course, the very title points in this direction, as it suggests figures who, we might expect, would prove more or less undifferentiated–-the "usual" types, manifesting only the sort of minor differences an eyewitness might pick out. Yet the five central figures—Keaton, Kint, Hockney, Fenster, and McManus—are quite different in size, dress, speech, and manner, hardly the similar types we expect to find in a line-up. And the film repeatedly underscores that oddity. While four of them have apparently been involved in hijackings, such as the one they are being questioned about at the start of the film, Kint notes that "It didn't make sense that I'd be there," and sums up the others' common feeling that the line-up was suspicious, did not "figure," that "This whole thing was a shakedown."

That note of "making sense" reminds us of the larger narrative pattern of *The Usual Suspects*, while it also eventually resounds in relation to several key figures who schematize the narrative's exploration of character, most notably Keaton, Kint, and U.S. Customs Special Agent David Kujan. Much of the narrative is a flashback by "Verbal" Kint who, six weeks before, had been drawn along with the others into a caper, a jewel heist that promised to bring them each a large payoff while also embarrassing a police department they knew to be corrupt. With his four accomplices apparently dead, Verbal, under the

interrogation of Agent Kujan, tells how the group was then lured into another heist that went wrong and eventually into a nearly suicidal attack on a freighter supposedly bearing $91 million in cocaine. Kint's narrative, seemingly drawn out under much pressure, piece by piece by Kujan, represents an apparent effort to make sense of these events, to find the coherent pattern here; as Kujan hammers home, "I want to know why 27 men died on that pier for what looks to be $91 million worth of drugs that wasn't there."

However, Kujan already has a theory, one tied precisely to his—and indeed a very classical—view of character, a view that binds everything up neatly, puts it, as it were, all in one envelope. Something of a monolithic critic himself, he believes that, ultimately, "there's no mystery," only a series of complications that lead back to one of those thieves, Dean Keaton, whose past history he knows well. As Kujan conceives it, he simply has to straighten out the twisted tale of one crook (Verbal) that has been made further crooked by a master crook (Keaton). Keaton, after all, has accomplished this feat before, as Kujan, in one of a number of embedded narratives here, tells how Keaton once beat a rap by faking his own death and reappearing after the charges were dropped and all the witnesses had mysteriously died.

That story obviously speaks to the larger mystery plot which is *The Usual Suspects*, and which links Kujan's conception of how these events might make sense with our own desire for a more comfortable narrative, one in which, despite the opening images of a wounded Keaton, a gun pointed at him, and the gun firing, despite a sort of Eisensteinian montage of attractions with all its attendant heavily determined narrative logic, Keaton might have survived and might even have orchestrated all of these terrible events simply to escape at last from the constant pursuit of good cops like Kujan. Such a scenario, at least, would locate us in the sort of clever, character-driven, and goal-directed action we have come to expect from classical narratives. Moreover, it would frame Kujan's repeated assertion, "I know Dean Keaton. I've been investigating him for the past 15 years," as a telling sign of predictability and reliability, an account of character as sameness, a marker of an underlying classical pattern of characterization. In this way, even the transgressive figure ultimately becomes a knowable character of the sort that has been seen as common to the film noir. Kujan's attitude affirms the knowability of these mysterious characters, assures us of his own central position in the narrative as the resolver of this enigma, and enthrones a kind of rational hegemony in this seemingly mysterious world; as he tells Verbal, he will find out what he wants to find out "because I'm smarter than you."[15]

The key issue, though, as a phenomenological vantage might suggest, is what that rationality cannot account for, the potential for change and unpredictability that seems central to Kujan's antagonist and, as a former cop, alter ego Keaton. At least as portrayed in Verbal's flashback, Keaton seems very different from his accomplices—in dress, in attitude, and especially in his aims. Unlike these other career criminals, he has apparently tried to put his past behind him and begin a new life, with the help of his lawyer fiancée Edie Finneran, as a restaurateur. Thus we see him initially resisting McManus's seductive offer of a "sweet deal" to hijack the New York's Finest Taxi service, later adding to the hijacking a twist that exposes

Keaton and Hockney react to a threat while McManus and Verbal watch.

the widespread corruption in the police force—thereby, we assume, underscoring the unjust way he seems singled out for police harassment and kept from changing—and eventually acceding to the deal with Keyser Soze's representative, not because Soze has his whole life neatly packaged in an envelope that might be turned over to the police, but in order to protect Edie. Regardless of Verbal's purpose, throughout this narrative Keaton—in large part because of Gabriel Byrne's portrayal which emphasizes his world-weariness and inner turmoil—seems a sympathetic, caring, and even principled character, one who challenges Kujan's stereotyped reading of him as a corrupt ex-cop, one who belies his theory that "a man can't change what he is," and one who, Kint's narrative keeps suggesting, tries in his own ways to "make a difference" here.

And as this film reminds us with its narrative about New York's Finest Taxi service, not all cops are good—or predictable—and not all are so adept at putting the pieces of a mystery together. As Verbal mockingly offers, "To a cop, the explanation is always simple." But the characters here, as the visual clues immediately begin to assert, are far from easy or even possible to read. As the film opens, for instance, we see not only Keaton wounded, slumped on the deck of the freighter he is preparing to blow up, but also a shadowy figure who quite literally pisses on his plans, putting out a stream of burning gasoline by which he planned to blow up that freighter, to demonstrate in a most immediate way what Robinson might term "the explosive potency of individuality."[16] The close-up of Keaton's face, however, gives way to a series of medium and close-up shots that repeatedly frame only parts of this shadow figure's body—torso, legs, hand holding a gun—effectively contrasting Keaton's individuality with this ambiguous physical presence, his face and its glance of knowledge with that elusive, fragmented, impersonal body. While these tightly framed shots frustrate our desire to come face to face with and identify this figure who apparently shoots Keaton, a series of crosscuts between the trail of gasoline set burning again and a tangled coil of rope at dockside, behind which we have seen Verbal hiding, point up the key issue for *The Usual Suspects*. Right from the start, the film is introducing a character who is unknowable, at least in the manner of classical narrative: as a figure who is marked by easily observable traits, whose motivations are readily understood, and who sets the plot in motion along a straight line. While, as we eventually learn, there is indeed a prime causal agent here, the mysterious and unphotographed Keyser Soze, he remains little more than an enigma, a figure whose very existence is only conjectured for most of the narrative: his traits pointedly unknown, his motivation simply to maintain power, the plot he sets in motion a Borgesian garden of forking paths, or in keeping with that one recurring image, a tangled coil of rope.

What Kujan gleans from Verbal's account, in fact, is that all of these events are actually about character—or more precisely, the obliteration of character in a classical sense with all of its attendant marks. For Verbal claims that everything was orchestrated by the Turkish master criminal Soze who, in the fashion of Orson Welles' Mr. Arkadin, had employed these usual suspects to eliminate some troublesome traces of his existence, especially a government informant who could identify him. To the skeptical Kujan, who has trouble even believing in Soze's existence—much as some critics might respond to the seemingly unknowable character—Verbal insists that this complex plotting is simply the ultimate mark of this mysterious figure's power; as he offers, "The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist." The mark of his power—and evil—then, is his ability to disguise or eliminate character, or simply reduce it to an abstraction.

That reference to the devil is significant in a number of ways here. For one, it reminds us that the narrative Verbal recounts is designed to have a kind of frightening effect, that it is meant to offer a glimpse of an evil that the conventional world, as exemplified by the skeptical Kujan, hardly recognizes and is loath to acknowledge. Yet it is an evil—and a challenge to the status quo—that some commentators would suggest is pointedly contained by the narrative's bounds, by Kint's words that have simply served up the essential trick of this film, the surprise ending in which we realize that Kint is himself Soze, whose account has worked to distract the authorities, disguise his true character, and give him a chance to escape. The shift from Verbal's first-person, flashback account to the third-person vantage that finally lets us in on the trick is, of course, motivated by our need to know and by the narrative's own desire to spring its surprise—after the fashion of Hitchcock's *Stage Fright* (1950)—the revelation that its narrator is a trickster, the point-of-view narration in which we have been immersed simply a twisted fabrication, his gimpy, timid, compulsively talking identity nothing more than an elaborate fiction of character—as may well be, for all we know, the portrayal he offers of Dean Keaton, particularly that emphasis on Keaton's inner turmoil. It is all simply the work of a postmodern bricoleur who

has neatly and offhandedly "knit" (from Kint, of course) this tale together from whatever bits and pieces—or people—were at hand.

Of course, that is precisely how he describes Keyser Soze—himself—anyway, as "a spook story that criminals tell their kids at night." And indeed, the tale of Soze is certainly frightening too, as Verbal tells how this figure, confronted by a group of Hungarian gangsters, shot his own wife and children in order to demonstrate his will to do whatever was necessary to succeed, and then allowed one Hungarian to escape so that he might relate these terrible events, tell the tale of his power, describe the things that mark his character. Thereafter, he becomes for the rest of the world nothing more than these marks, just an abstraction, or as he is variously styled, "a shield, "a myth," "a spook story." In effect, Soze—and Verbal in the recounting—has simply generated a narrative driven by a goal-directed character who is just a collection of horrific marks or exaggerated impressions, in the process demonstrating how easily the components of such narratives—dramatic speech, compulsive action, distinctive features—are generated and hold us in their thrall—or stall us in our movements and interrogations of reality, much as they do Kujan, who lets him escape.

Indeed, their dramatic power easily covers the gaps of logic, the inconsistencies we might readily observe in characterization, as a performative dimension of the film underscores. The actor Kevin Spacey no more suggests the image of a legendary Turkish gangster, especially the tall, demonic figure conjured in Kint's account and so terribly feared by the lone survivor of the shootout, than does his character Verbal. And even with his skin darkened to suggest, we suppose, an Asian extraction, the tall, very English Peter Postlethwaite hardly answers as the Japanese lawyer Kobayashi. Both become emblematic of the individual's ability to create, construct, be whatever he desires. Yet as we learn, Soze is also quite real, a figure whose strength lies precisely in his ability to change, to adapt, to adopt whatever marks or traits—such as the stutter, crippled walk, and nervous chatter of a Verbal—he needs to survive. In effect, his power lies in his ability to reflect the problematic nature of language: ambiguous, multiply allusive, a construct that, as Derrida might suggest, both displays and erases meaning. This ability allows him to play at being a character in a world that seems inclined to see people in static ways, in terms of a comforting and reliable stability, even while he taunts those around him with tales of change and unpredictability, as with Keaton. As the name Verbal implies, he relies on our rational predilection, the obeisance we pay to language, as he offers a torrent of words, while playfully noting, "People say I talk too much," and draws upon whatever his confining world presents him with—in this case, the random elements found in a San Piedro police station—to conjure up just the sort of character the police are looking for and the type of narrative in which they want to situate him.

Of course, that ability does not render him a figure of value, one of any heroic status—a rather irrelevant notion, in any case, in the context of both this style of character and neo-noir. Rather, Kint/Soze becomes a figure of difference, as he mediates between Kujan, who insists to the last that his view of character as constant is reliable, and Keaton, who, even as a product of Kint's narration, represents a challenge to that notion, as a sign that individuals might change and even develop moral value. As he plays at the very margins of difference, as simultaneously a prisoner and someone who, as one policeman puts it, "is protected from up on high," as a frightened, manipulated man and the ultimate manipulator and purveyor of fear, Kint/Soze interrogates the system—psychological, cultural, narrative—in which we seem so comfortable. To a world that denies change, he is thus the ultimate outlaw, truly the devil, a changeling who moves in and out of character at will, in and out of plots, within and beyond the laws this world employs to maintain its illusory order. In the process he reveals just how contingent this world and its sense of order are. Ultimately, he embodies a kind of destructive power inherent in a world that insists change and difference are impossible, and thereby indicts that world's values in a rather new way.

In letting Verbal/Soze go, in setting him loose to continue his manipulations, Agent Kujan demonstrates the danger of hearing but not seeing, of not engaging oneself with the world, especially of not looking at the stuff that crowds all around us. His dogged insistence that Keaton was ultimately behind this crime that made no sense evokes a tradition of problematic noir investigators, such as the insurance company detective Riordan of *The Killers* (1946), the private detective Brad Galt of *The Dark Corner* (1946), or the poisoned accountant Frank Bigelow of *D.O.A.* (1950), all of whom claim that they only want to uncover a reason or logic behind events, to turn what Mike Hammer of *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955) terms "the Great Whatsit" into an answered question, even if it means, as in the last film, unleashing an atomic calamity, or, in *The Killers*, producing a nearly pointless result: "The basic rate of the Atlantic Casualty Company . . . will probably drop one-tenth of a cent."

That mocking trivialization of Riordan's "splendid efforts" reverberates in *The Usual Suspects*'s unsettling conclusion, as Kujan receives, too late, a sketch of Soze/Kint, a portrait of the face that has been staring back at him and, via a number of subjective shots, us, for much of this narrative, the face that completes those various fragmentary shots of the figure who pisses on all plans at the film's start, the face that is, in fact, the disguised eye of perception itself, of this movie's point of view. In this case that rationalizing of events with an almost ludicrous payoff becomes a warning about all such single-minded pursuits: all that subordinate seeing to language, knowledge of another to the marks that stand in for, and effectively become, character. Yet it is a warning that resounds throughout the recent crop of neo-noirs, populated as they are with elusive, enigmatic, role-playing figures who seem to function in much the same way, that is, mainly to bring us face to face with our expectations of character—expectations driven by long-standing cinematic experience, as well as by a conventional way of thinking about film. For repeatedly films like *The Last Seduction*, *Romeo Is Bleeding*, *Pulp Fiction*, and *L.A. Confidential* play at trying to pin characters down, to blackmail them, to put them in an envelope, as Soze does with all five of the "suspects" in this film, to reduce them to a series of simple marks, or like Wolf in *Pulp Fiction*, to clean up the "mess" of character and render our narrative world clean and comfortable again. Yet a disturbing difference always remains, and the difference that marks the figures in such films is what now propels their narratives—and often seems to send them moving not in the easy, goal-directed, goal-attaining direction of classical narrative, nor even skidding thrillingly along the sharp curves that marked traditional noirs, but seemingly spinning out of control, or at least out of the "usual," suspected trajectory, so that they seem less about a character than about the very mechanisms of character in which we invest so much. But along that path there also lies the potential for a new subversive development, for projecting a rather different sense of character, of individuality, one that might even challenge our usual perceptions and values.

I recognize that those who tend to view character and its narrative function in the classical, nondifferentiated way described above might anticipate this sort of development. It would simply illustrate how, over long periods of time and changing cultural dynamics, Hollywood "has selectively borrowed from the international art cinema," as Bordwell explains, through a process of "stylistic assimilation."[17] He sees "psychologically ambivalent or confused characters" as a key structure in the larger semiotic of "art" or modernist narrative. While that structural approach has provided us with a rather neat, even "comfortable" way of conceptualizing the development of cinematic narrative, it does draw upon a sense of the cinema as a kind of monological voice, addressing an ideal and passive spectator, while always bracketing off its own manner of address, or what Sobchack terms "the film's body."[18] While Robinson's value approach never sought to schematize the nature of that spectatorship, it did approach the cinema as a vital visual encounter, as something that, as Sobchack puts it, "quite concretely returns us, as viewers and theorists, to our

Verbal looks on as McManus listens to partner Fenster.

senses"[19] in the phenomenological tradition of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Gaston Bachelard. We might note that in an early overview of such approaches, Dudley Andrew warned that "the classification of general formal codes" which typified structural film theory threatened "to retard the . . . tasks of describing the peculiar way meaning is experienced in cinema and the unique quality" of the cinematic experience.[20] By culling something from this tradition, as more recently Sobchack and several others have tried to do,[21] and in the way that Robinson's analysis of character suggests, perhaps we can better situate the seeming anomalies of movie narrative; by allying an emphasis on the filmic experience itself with that useful but relatively static conception of narrative development—one that divides narrative into classical and art forms—we might better understand specific films which challenge classical norms and, in their subtle ways, point up the nature and potential of the movies.

The Usual Suspects offers an especially telling illustration in this regard, particularly of the impact of character in the neo-noir. It is a film that begins with a mystery and almost literally invites its viewers to play at guessing that mystery, at ferreting out the clues to its narrative and anticipating its twist ending. Moreover, that mystery depends totally on the film's conception—and our own orchestrated and convention-driven misconception—of character, a set of reactions that pointedly flies in the face of our anticipation of narrative conservatism and undercuts one sort of pleasure or comfort we have come to expect from our films. In its place it offers us a different take on character, one that underscores the very real—changing, self-creating, even unfathomable—nature of character that truly character-izes our era's noir and that has always stood as an energizing potential in the larger tradition of film noir.

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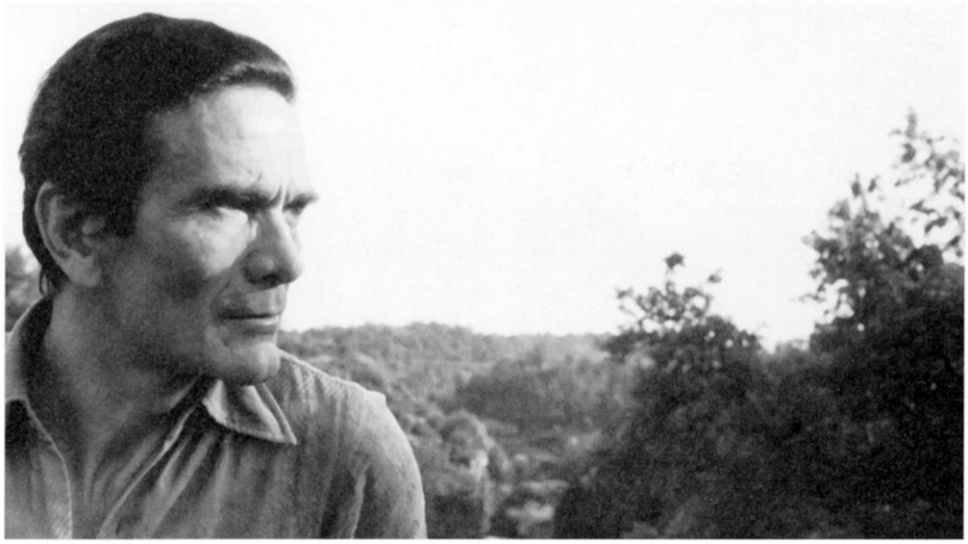
Notes

This essay is intended as a tribute to the work of a former teacher, W. R. Robinson.

1. W. R. Robinson, "The Movies As a Revolutionary Moral Force, Part II." *Contempora* 2.1 (1972), p. 27.
2. See David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson's *The Classical Hollywood Cinema and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 75, 77.
3. Ibid., p. 77.
4. Ibid., p. 13.
5. Ibid., pp. 32, 24.
6. Ibid., p. 77.
7. Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. xviii.
8. "The Movies As a Revolutionary Moral Force, Part I," *Contempora* 1.6 (1971), p. 15.
9. "The Movies As a Revolutionary Moral Force, Part II," p. 33.
10. For more particular elaboration on the literary narrative/film narrative contrast, I would recommend Robinson and Mary McDermott's article, "*2001* and the Literary Sensibility," *The Georgia Review* 26 (1972), 26-37, as well as my application of this approach in an all-too-obviously derivative essay, "The Organic Narrative: Word and Image in *Barry Lyndon*," *Film Criticism* 3.2 (1979), 18-31.
11. W.R. Robinson, *Man and the Movies* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin, 1969), p. 126.
12. Sobchack, p. xviii.
13. Ibid., p.5.
14. "The Movies as a Revolutionary Moral Force, Part II," p. 27.
15. That boast carries significant weight because it also identifies our idealized place within the film, as spectators who typically know more than the diegetic characters. Our alignment—if not quite identification—with Kujan in this regard thus becomes not only part of the narrative's strategy of surprise, but also part of its examination of character, as it ultimately challenges us to question the position of superiority that attaches to his person and that derives from those notions of predictability, rationality, and sameness he espouses.
16. Taken from an unpublished manuscript, *From Myth to Monism: The Narrative Feats of Plato and Aristotle*, p. 24.
17. *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, p. 373.
18. Sobchack, p. 226.
19. Ibid., p. 13.
20. Dudley Andrew. "The Neglected Tradition of Phenomenology in Film Theory," *Wide Angle* 2.2 (1978), p. 46.
21. In her ambitious text, *The Address of the Eye*, Sobchack makes a more systematic move in the direction Robinson staked out in the 1960s and 1970s. Grounding her examination specifically in the European tradition of phenomenology, as exemplified by Merleau-Ponty, she describes how film holds the potential for confronting us with "the perceptual correlations that are the film's activity," a potential for the "production of vision as visible" (226), even if that capacity usually "remains implicit in its materiality," disguised in the material bodies that classical narrative thrusts to the foreground (226). See too Andrew's article, "The Neglected Tradition of Phenomenology in Film Theory," wherein he describes how "phenomenology seeks to put reason and language at the service of life or at least of human experience" (49), as well as Kevin Sweeney's review of recent developments in this regard, "The Persistence of Vision: The Re-Emergence of Phenomenological Theories of Film," *Film and Philosophy* 1 (1994), pp. 29-38.

Maurizio Viano



Who Is Killing Pasolini?

Two Books and Two Films show how to keep him alive

You don't make up
for your sins in church,
you do it in the streets.
—*Mean Streets*

Sam Rohdie, *The Passion of Pier Paolo Pasolini* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press/BFI, 1996).

Patrick Rumble, *Allegories of Contamination: Pier Paolo Pasolini's Trilogy of Life* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

Nerolio (1996) Director/writer: Aurelio Grimaldi. Producers: Leonardo Giuliano, Caterina Nardi. Cinematography: Maurizio Calvesi. Music: Maria Soldatini.

Who Killed Pasolini? (*Pasolini: un delitto Italiano*, [1995]) Director: Marco Tullio Giordana. Producer: Mario Cecchi Gori. Screenplay: Giordana, Sandro Petraglia, Stefano Rulli. Cinematography: Franco Lecca. Music: Ennio Morricone.

Pier Paolo Pasolini's films and writings, his life and death, are no doubt endowed with the same "desperate vitality" that he himself claimed to possess. The object of the most diverse appropriations and readings, they are pawns in cultural struggles today much as they were when he died over twenty years ago. As someone who is trying to figure out ways to induce American students (viewers) to make use of some of his films and ideas, I wear certain glasses when looking at what is being produced about him. Through these glasses, for example, I am suspicious of anything that might fly over the heads of smart undergraduates. Through such glasses I see Patrick Rumble's and Sam Rohdie's books as being about more than just Pasolini. They are statements about what can be done in the cultural practice known as academic film criticism. What follows, then, is a review of two books and two films seen through the scrutinizing filter of my spectacles.

Patrick Rumble's *Allegories of Contamination* focuses on *The Decameron* (1971), *The Canterbury Tales* (1972), and *The Arabian Nights* (1974)—the three controversial films known as "The Trilogy of Life" that brought Pasolini commercial success and marked his break with his earlier "difficult" style. Enthusiastic about these films, Rumble has written a book that mobilizes an impressive array of theoretical references around one central idea: *The Trilogy of Life* is the site of stylistic contamination and excess, hence subversion. In these films, Rumble maintains, Pasolini has mixed perspectives and blended references from paintings and other visual codes, thus bringing "the cinematic model into conflict with the painterly model, and in so doing the spectator's consciousness is made to vacillate between two diverse competencies" (47). Pictorial references and the adoption of painterly codes create a "painting effect" which destabilizes the illusionism of the cinematic image. It is a self-conscious style, one "that must therefore constantly call attention to itself, to its language, and thus bring the spectator to an ironic awareness of his 'disciplined' perspective" (27).

Rumble does his best to bestow a political dimension on Pasolini's contamination and excess. "The pleasure of the trilogy is never divorced from an awareness of ideology, an awareness brought about through stylistic experimentation" (64). As to the individual films: "*The Decameron* reveals how occasionally in history a people will take back the storytelling function from those institutions that would appropriate it and monopolize it" (132); *The Canterbury Tales* "is an allegory of a community or institution *da farsi*" (a community to be made, [61]); *The Arabian Nights* contain quotes from Persian and Rajput miniatures, which "should be taken as emblematic of this form of cultural resistance" (70).

Allegories of Contamination parades what not too long ago I would have labeled "a leftist" framework (awareness, community, subversion, and resistance; plus founding quotes from Althusser, Goldmann, etc.). And it is because of its abuse of such a framework that I regard this book as simultaneously typical and dangerous: typical of much criticism, and dangerous for what it does to Pasolini, cinema, and theory.

A most immediate, and telling, problem lies in Rumble's uncritical use of "the spectator," that phantom who allegedly gains "ironic awareness" by watching these films and therefore proves their worth. Clearly "the spectator" does not refer to average empirical viewers, who hardly have the desire to catch and/or care about difficult intertextual links. Maybe Rumble has in mind the ideal spectator, the theoretical construct implied in and by the text. But, why doesn't he ever problematize the issue? His own lack of ironic awareness, and his failure to position himself critically, are disturbing, especially since he writes within a "leftist framework" about Pasolini, about *The Trilogy.* A few critics, for example, have expressed reservations about Pasolini's attempt to sell *The Trilogy* as his most political films. Rumble does mention something to this extent, but fails to account for what his own enthusiasm might mean. Is it an accident that the majority of admirers of *The Trilogy* are Italianists in Anglo-American academia who rejoice at the highbrow intertextuality that *The Decameron* allows? Such a doubt is reinforced by Rumble's decision to dedicate a 35-page chapter to precisely that film, while he discusses the other two in a collective chapter which, incidentally, has 15 more pages on *The Decameron.* Why not pay more attention to *The Arabian Nights*—the one film in *The Trilogy* that might indeed lead to more practical, if not urgent, explorations of Orientalism in Pasolini and his culture? Is it because he does not want to plow through a disorienting original, whereas Boccaccio is right there, waiting to be reconfirmed in its canonical presence?

It may be useful at this point to take a closer look at the type of writing and knowledge that *Allegories of Contamination* produces and at the community it actually creates.

In the middle of his discussion of *The Canterbury Tales* Rumble declares, once again, his interest in "stylistic excesses," and states that the quotes from Brueghel and Bosch in this film do not have narrative motivation: "Divorced from such motivation, they become pure excess, and, as Costa suggests, call our attention away from the narrative and towards the enunciation" (54). The next paragraph begins by paraphrasing "the 'neoformalist' theorist Kristin Thompson's understanding of cinematic excess" and ends with a long, difficult quote by Stephen Heath on how "homogeneity is haunted by the material practices it represses" (55). Still invoking Thompson's authority, the next paragraph suggests that films foregrounding their stylistic worlds force the spectators to skid in their interpretation of the narrative.

The idea is not new; in fact, it has circulated in film theory since the late 1960s, as Rumble hastens to inform us by linking such "skidding" to Barthes' notion of "third meaning." By this point, I, empirical reader with Ph.D., feel bruised, as it were, by this endless bouncing against hard, ivory walls. But I ponder the idea of "skidding," and I like it; I like the image of

a spectator "forced" to skid from the plot to other concerns. And after almost 60 pages of erudite "theory," I rejoice as the following paragraph starts off with a long overdue question: "What is the value of this skidding perception brought about by a perception of excess?" (56). "Here we go," I tell myself. " Now Rumble will get into the value of skidding, he will give us a practical example by skidding himself. What better way to validate the practice of skidding than showing what one can do with it?" But untouched by this opportunity, Rumble stays well within the walls of the theorist's tower, and goes on citing Thompson and then Shklovsky and then Thompson and Heath again.

Thus we have a book whose system of values is clearly skewed in favor of such concepts as excess, violation of codes, transgression of habits—every time Rumble ascertains a stylistic violation of the unspoken rules of cinematography, or an attack against visual codes, we are meant to imply that Pasolini did something valuable. But if excess and violation really are "the good guys," then why doesn't Rumble exceed and violate *his own* codes of academic writing? What are we to think about a book which declares its admiration for Pasolini's transgressions while failing to make one single connection between Pasolini's antagonism and its own practice? Since Rumble identifies the enemy as "a style productive of passive viewing habits," I have replaced the word "viewing" with "writing," and I imagined myself asking: "What about a style, the academic, that is equally productive of passive writing and reading habits?" Academic writing needs as much violation as those "passive viewing habits" against which nearly every academic rails.

To return to my original question: Who is "the spectator" whose increased awareness validates *The Trilogy* and the book(s) on it? I now have the certainty that he or she is, in fact, an academic (and most likely an Italianist), or, better, an academic like Rumble, since I am an academic and an Italianist, but I happen to feel differently. But is the book ever willing to talk to academics who feel differently? Only in the afterword, where Rumble feels obligated to talk a bit about homosexuality in a funereal tone, does he acknowledge the existence of critics with other priorities. Isn't it odd for a book that values community not to try to talk to anybody other than academics like its author? And doesn't the notion of the spectator surreptitiously have its parallel in the idea of the reader of the book? Questions, questions . . .

Within the walls erected by academic writing, the book's triumphant positivism does what it knows best: it reifies everything, even Pasolini's "desperate vitality." Insofar as Rumble presumes Pasolini to be a thing to be dissected, an autonomous center to which all of his own writing must aim, his is a perfect example of *centripetal* criticism. This does not just make Pasolini an exclusively academic commodity. It is also a way of disqualifying theory. No wonder everyone else scorns theory—in class, in conversation, in life. Pasolini's value also lies in his dilettantesque dabbling in theory, his Gramscian belief that everyone is a philosopher, that is, a theorist. Instead of giving an example of how theory is the flight of the phoenix that rises from the ashes of each and everyone's consumption, Rumble chooses to play the expert talking to experts. The consumerist paradise that he repeatedly chastises via his praise of Pasolini the transgressor thrives in critical works that raise academic walls around them, and thus constitute pieces of technical, impersonal, professional expertise.

Compared to *Allegories of Contamination*, Sam Rohdie's *The Passion of Pier Paolo Pasolini* is refreshingly personal and full of unpredictable tangents. Lest you get the impression, however, that I am setting up a binary opposition between the two, let me say right away that Rohdie's book, too, remains within the walls of the academic citadel. But his short, confessional preface has the merit of acknowledging just that:

> Writing about Pasolini has placed my own language in crisis. Much as I would have liked to have taken hold of him as an object for biography, ideology, meaning, history, including a history of forms, Pasolini escaped my attempt to do so. Every time I thought I had him, he was gone. . . .

We are far from Rumble's unquestioning approach. Pasolini is being recognized as an author who sets off a crisis in those who write about him.

Perhaps a mixed bag is inevitable when dealing with Pasolini's volcanic, contradictory textuality. Ironically, the strongest moments in the book occur when it is most mixed, that is when Rohdie talks about authors or texts for which he has an affinity and forces them to bear on the discourse on Pasolini. Conversely, Rohdie often uses (rather than interprets) Pasolini in order to enter other territories. The frequent comparisons with Rossellini and with novelist Elsa Morante; the dizzying connections established with Bakhtin, Carlo Ginzburg, and Mannerism; the attempt to unmask Pasolini's love for Africa via Levi-Strauss's nostalgia for primitive civilizations—all these rank as good moments in the book because they do not pro-

vide just erudite quotes but useful analogies. And it is precisely on analogy that Rohdie is most illuminating: "What makes writing about Pasolini so difficult is that the only effective way to grasp his thought is to find in one's own writing an analogy of it" (53).

Also commendable is Rohdie's decision to avoid hagiography and point out some of the self-serving inconsistencies to be found in Pasolini. Especially in the second half of the book, Rohdie dares to suggest that Pasolini (ab)used certain topics and targets idiosyncratically, that the reality of innocent bodies, the mythical past, and the horror of consumerism were also part of a complicated "psychosomatic" drama. This does not detract from the validity of Pasolini's positions, but it offers a more complex picture, giving Pasolini a body and a soul (and not just a mind), and showing that he was a mixed bag himself.

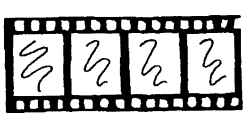
The book's greatest merit lies in Rohdie's choice of texts, his focusing of critical attention, at last, on marginal works, on such films as *La rabbia*, *Notes for an Indian Film*, and *Notes for an African Orestes*, or such writings as *Gennariello* and *Il padre selvaggio*. This allows him to explore discursive configurations hinging on different priorities. A look at the titles of the book's seven chapters is enlightening: "Pasolini Fragments," "India," "And Africa?," "Revolution," "Gennariello," "Writing," "Marilyn"—in a sense these titles, situated as they are at the beginning, constitute a preview of sorts, a seductive evocation of images for what is to come.

Take the title for chapter one: "Pasolini Fragments." The choice of fragments is the process by which one selects, more or less consciously, the material from Pasolini's polymorphous textuality. One may actually disagree with the "fragments" Rohdie chooses, or his reading of them. His title, however, stages the author's awareness of the fragmentary nature of a journey through Pasolini. Or take the last chapter: "Marilyn." Pasolini's never-seen-in-America montage-film *La rabbia* contains a most touching and sublime moment, one of his best: the segment dedicated to Marilyn Monroe. In the collage of newsreel images, amidst atomic explosions and suffering humans, Pasolini grafts a few photographs of Marilyn Monroe, punctuated by some haunting shots unrelated to her, such as a boxing match and a self-flagellating, all made-up man. On the sound track, the novelist Giorgio Bassani's voice reads a text Pasolini wrote for the film, a hymn to Marilyn as the symbol of all the beauty colonized by a world that only tolerates serialized beauty. Tellingly, Rohdie's last chapter merely quotes this "Marilyn poem," without a word of commentary. It is hard to imagine a more fitting conclusion for a book written by a positivist voice in crisis.

Unfortunately, "the crisis" in Rohdie's voice does not lead him to try a different type of speech. "Writing," nominally the subject of the short sixth chapter, dominates the entire book. "Writing," here, is to be understood in the poststructuralist sense of *écriture*, difference, *mise-en-abîme*, placing images between mirrors so as to see them recede to infinity. Invariably, Rohdie sees writing at work everywhere in Pasolini. And just as invariably, he practices writing throughout his book. Many of its passages read as totally locked in a discursive horizon drawn by writing, so that the latter sets a speech level and makes everything veer towards the hopelessly academic.

Inevitably, Rohdie enters the thorny question of Pasolini's will to reality, and gets all twisted in poststructuralist contortions. Refuting his theses on Pasolini and reality, or on Pasolini as a modernist, or on the ubiquity of mirror effects, is not something I care to do. In the first place, I am convinced that given the "right" choice of fragments, you can activate a realist Pasolini as well as a modernist, postmodernist, Catholic, humanist, Marxist, and so on. Second, in order to refute Rohdie, one would have to play the same linguistic game, that is one would have to enter, and thereby give reality to and confirm the existence of, the academic writing game. Ideally, that is in theory, I would recommend fleeing such a game.

To return to the metaphor of the academic walls, they are still there, although in *The Passion of Pier Paolo Pasolini* the movement inside the walls has somewhat changed direction. If Rumble's book was unquestioningly *centripetal*, moving more and more inside the walls, and excluding almost all readers but a few, Rohdie's has several *centrifugal* moments. They are not enough to break the walls, but the author's unease with them is at least voiced.



Inspired by Enzo Siciliano's biography of the filmmaker, *Who Killed Pasolini?* is the result of Marco Tullio Giordana's conviction that the mystery surrounding Pasolini's death can still be tapped for political and ethical insights. Giordana enlisted the writing skills of Stefano Rulli and Sandro Petraglia, the two screenwriters behind much of the recent revival of Italian political cinema (e. g., *Forever Mery*, 1989, and *Stolen Children*, 1992), and the outcome is a tight narrative that is not afraid of adopting Hollywood formulas (the initial car chase, the long courtroom drama) to dramatize Giordana's findings and lead the audience to an alternative truth about the murder: Pasolini's assassin, Pino Pelosi, was not alone. Intercutting scenes from various milieus in a sort of God's-eye investigation, the film suggests, among other things, that Pelosi's unknown accomplices may have been linked to right-wing and/or criminal organizations. The main idea, however, is that the bigotry and hatred around the figure of Pasolini had created the conditions for both the crime and its impunity. There was no plot from above, just as there is no absolute power—plots and power take place in a Foucauldian way, within a web of little and no-so-little people taking advantage of the situations and positions in which they exist. And in the Italy of the 1970s, a country ruled by a party that would virtually melt away on corruption charges fifteen years later, it is quite possible that some politicians and/or police officials would contribute to the quagmire surrounding Pasolini's death. This is what Giordana's film tries passionately to prove.

Noteworthy, from a strictly cinematographic point of view, is Giordana's decision not to have any actor impersonate the filmmaker. Pasolini is seen and heard in audiovisual quotes from films, documentaries, or repertory material. A double portrays him only during the brief montage reconstructing the murder and we see only his back. As to the creation of false documentary images, Giordana, who did not have expensive technology at his disposal, blurred the distinction between "reality" and reconstruction only on a few occasions. For instance, to bestow the look of a worn-out, black-and-white newsreel on his shots, Giordana subjected the film's negative to repeated passages, reshooting the results on video. We are thus closer to Orson Welles' dragging *Citizen Kane* on the studio's floors in order to recreate the scratched look of an old newsreel than we are to *Forrest Gump*'s digital wizardry.

Whatever wizardry is to be found in *Who Killed Pasolini?* is achieved through editing. From the film's fast pace to its multiple perspectives and "falsification" of newsreels, editing is the film's most skillful, if also most controversial, feature. It mixes fact, dramatic re-creation, and conjecture in a way not dissimilar from *JFK*, a film that is often mentioned in Italy when speaking of *Who Killed Pasolini?*. But *Who Killed Pasolini?* utilizes its unpredictable collage format until the end, and, above all, refrains from coalescing point of view into one central character the way *JFK* does. Here there is no main character. Editing dissipates point of view and, in a sense, it even fragments "truth." Rather than Stone's film on "an American crime," the unsurpassed model for *Who Killed Pasolini?* seems to be Errol Morris's *The Thin Blue Line* (1988), a documentary (of sorts) which similarly questioned the outcome of a trial at the end of an editing tour de force.

Who Killed Pasolini? is, yes, marred by naivete and hagiography (for instance, the lawyers representing the Pasolinis are rhetorically constructed as the truth's voice, the ideal inheritors of the filmmaker's legacy), but the film contains a powerful, if unintentional, antidote to its own flaws: its "editing lesson." Even if the authors' probable intention was to come up with *the* actual truth, *Who Killed Pasolini?* would still implicitly assert that truths are "editing effects," effects of the choice and juxtaposition of fragments. Once "the truth" is questioned and Pasolini becomes a matter of re-editing, once the "desperate vitality" of Pasolini's legacy becomes a matter of fragments to be selected and reordered in a new sequence, then, the film's editing lesson goes, we are free to create our collages, our stories. In fact, editing is more than splicing a few images together. It is also the act of taking something out of Pasolini and grafting it into other signifying chains. Instead of aiming to produce more auterist readings, one can cut some of his work out, and use it (thereby valorizing it) in other areas such as, for example, addiction studies and queer theory.

With the provisional term of addiction studies I refer to the scattered activities of a growing number of people, inside and outside academia, who have sensed the huge political and intellectual stakes in the study of intoxication and addiction. It is a quintessentially interdisciplinary area of discourse, ranging from the investigation of "alcoholic" texts to the creation of a counter-hegemonic force against "the war on drugs." Pasolini is relevant to addiction studies for two reasons. The first, more general, is the theoretical adjacency of "the homosexual" and "the addict": Conceptually, both categories were born at around the same time and out of similar taxonomic impulses. Second, and much more important, Pasolini lived his

own sexuality as an addiction, routinely going through the various cyclic stations of this modern Via Dolorosa. Some of his films offer vertiginous glimpses of this cycle (e. g., *La Ricotta*'s portrayal of a bodily desire transgressively fulfilled and ending in death). His postumously published (1994), unfinished novel *Petrolio*, indeed an anti-novel à la *Naked Lunch*, contains paradigms that are typical of the narratives of addiction (e.g., a Jekyll/Hyde duality), and offers a view of sex as an intoxicating experience capable of blasting open the "doors of perception."

By queer theory I intend both a body of signs and the people who emit them. The body of signs, mostly written, tends to gravitate around non-straight sexuality. The people, mostly in academia, tend to act like the children and the grandchildren of, respectively, the gay/lesbian and homophile movements: they exist in dialectical tension with their antecedents. Insofar as they are determined to resist definition for what they are and do, queer theorists can tap Pasolini for methodological insights, for he made an art of his stubborn refusal to be labeled. By entitling a collection of essays *Scritti Corsari* (*Pirate Writings*), Pasolini chose piracy's black flag as a symbol for a practice that constantly reinvented itself anew. The ways in which his pirate theory maintained a state of permanent contradiction are certainly exemplary for anyone worried about the rigidity of discursive identities.

As a point of fact, there is one position that queer theorists have taken with enough consistency for it to become queer theory's unofficial tenet: the rejection of the strong identity that had animated the gay movement. Difference, instead of identity, is both the premise and the goal of queer theory. Likewise, Pasolini never aligned himself with the identity politics of the burgeoning gay movement; in a sense, he never "came out" officially, and was criticized for it. After an initial interest—sparked by the circumstances of his death, the persecution that he endured while alive, and the respect he commanded as an artist—most gay (film) critics set him aside. Many were understandably turned off by his rejection of a political dimension for his homosexuality, his guilt, and his self-deprecation. Uninterested in "mature" relationships with adult males and "addicted" to brief (maybe mercenary, maybe masochistic) encounters with teen-agers, his sexuality was a sort of embarrassment for those in the movement who most sought legitimacy and acceptance.

Today, in the light of queer theory, some of Pasolini's positions acquire another value. His "refusal to be gay" becomes a genealogical precedent, an early example of the fight against identity (politics). His marginal sexuality becomes just another pathway of desire in the melting pot of sexual practices, as legitimate an outlet as any other (once issues of power and consent, in the case of intergenerational sex, have been settled). Once the parallels between queer theory and Pasolini are established, it would be possible, and fascinating, to articulate the latter's poetic and filmic representations of sex/gender with queer theory's mostly (over)written mode of theorizing—remembering perhaps how Pasolini explored the possibility of doing theory with cinema (e.g., *Teorema*).

The work that most lends itself to a queer appropriation is *Petrolio*. In effect, I expect a slow, gradual, and yet explosive, "discovery" of this theoretical novel (or fictional theory) by queer theorists. *Petrolio* is theory made "novel." In it, the protagonist's (sexual) identity slides along various spectra, *as does the writer's*. Pasolini's rejection of identity (politics) is thus backed by his mode of doing theory (writing, but also filming). And I am wondering whether some queer theorists are not too settled, however "subversively," within the walls of academic writing, a gesture that would bestow on them a stable identity in the very space in which they refuse having one.

Perhaps it is no accident that the portrayal of "addiction" to "queer sex" is such a big part of the most recent of the films inspired by Pasolini, Aurelio Grimaldi's *Nerolio* (the title is from *nero* [black] + *petrolio* [oil], a piece of associative montage if there ever was one). Indeed, it is as if Grimaldi, one of Italy's most provocative new directors, had explored audiovisually, for us, the two areas discussed above. Presented to a mixed response at the Locarno Film Festival in 1996, *Nerolio* is still unreleased in Italy. The film is divided into three "chapters." The first aims to clarify the relationship between the filmmaker and the *ragazzi*. The second depicts an imaginary young aspiring writer's search for the poet's protection, emphasizing Pasolini's contempt for official culture. And the third, of course, retells the infamous last hours before the murder. Unlike *Who Killed Pasolini?*, *Nerolio* proposes a less heroic version of Pasolini's death: the film accepts Pelosi's (the murderer) version that he did it in self-defense while fending off Pasolini's advances. Unlike Giordana, Grimaldi was courageous, or impertinent, enough to give Pasolini a face (Marco Cavicchioli). Above all, Grimaldi's film is permeated by a subtle, but no less intense, erotic charge which erupts on a few occasions, graphically depicting various sexual encounters. Among them, is a timely cinematic translation of *Petrolio*'s notorious "blow-job chapter": some 60 pages in which the pro-

tagonist performs fellatio on a group of *ragazzi*, a *truly* astonishing piece of literature, and, maybe, an equally astonishing "confession."

Powered by art critic Maurizio Calvesi's high-contrast, black-and-white photography, *Nerolio* both seeks scandal and makes beauty and sense. However different from Giordana's film, *Nerolio* has heeded, so to speak, the latter's editing lesson, in that it has rearranged Pasolinian fragments to come up with a "truth" of its own, a "truth" that Italians do not like to face because it reminds them of a side of Pasolini they prefer to forget. Grimaldi says the film is neither a documentary nor a simple Pasolini putdown. Rather, he was attempting to take a hard look at an artist who was nearly universally scorned during his lifetime, but who has now become a sacred icon. And it was indeed a hard look, for *Nerolio* avoids the hagiography that occasionally mars *Who Killed Pasolini?*, and honestly records Pasolini's human and tragic fragility.

Pasolini is a pawn in an ongoing cultural struggle, and what we do with his texts matters. In order to act on (rather than just enthusiastically formulate) the intuition that Pasolini transgressed codes and put voices in crisis, it is necessary to dismember him—as Pasolini himself, at the end of *Hawks and Sparrows*, suggested we do. Yes, one should dismember his oeuvre, reedit the fragments, feed them to the undergraduates, or disseminate them in "extravagant" projects. (Did not Pasolini himself conceive, in *Gennariello*, the wild dream of teaching semiotics to the Neapolitan subproletariat?) Addiction studies and queer theory are but two directions that such a centrifugal, non-auteurist project could take. This seems to me the only way to drag Pasolini outside the academic walls and keep him alive. A professor of religion here at Wellesley College, who shows *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* in his class on Jesus, may be doing more to keep Pasolini alive than some academic books. And this final, provocative statement of mine should not be read as a plea against theory, but against theory performed through the type of *academic* writing whose idiosyncrasies and pitfalls I have exposed above. Pasolini's work is too full of baffling hooks, echoes, and reverberations to restrict access to his work to the (un)happy few. The poetry of his life and his films deserves to break through those academic walls and see the streets.

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Edited by Bert Cardullo, Harry Geduld, Ronald Gottesman, and Leigh Woods
Foreword by Stanley Kauffmann

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Review

Cop Land

Writer/director: James Mangold. Cinematographer: Eric Edwards. Editor: Craig McKay. Music: Howard Shore. Miramax.

In his past roles, Sylvester Stallone's hangdog countenance, sleepy with mournful aggression, has concealed explosive, righteous rage. In James Mangold's *Cop Land,* it reveals entrenched and stubborn melancholy. Despite a climactic shoot-out with cool overtones of *Taxi Driver*, the explosion never really comes. Stallone's face—its droopy, baleful gaze, downturned lips, nascent jowls—bears the imprint of this movie's distinctive sensibility as surely as Pruitt Taylor Vince's pasty, moist-eyed face did that of Mangold's previous film, *Heavy*; and Stallone's performance as Freddy Heflin, the small-town sheriff who wanted to be a big-city cop, is the film's unlikely setpiece, to be admired, like so much in the film itself, for everything it does *not* do.

On the strength of *Heavy* and his new film, Mangold appears to be striving to forge an authentically ascetic style within the decidedly inhospitable climate of contemporary Hollywood. His decision to follow the anomalously quiet *Heavy* with a police-procedural that appears at least superficially to be in the up-to-the-minute blockbuster mode feels a bit like an exercise, an experiment in spiritual temptation-and-resistance, and the news here is that Mangold has *not* sold out, as so many young filmmakers do after a first independent hit. Once the conventions of the genre have been set in place, Mangold goes on to work against every one of them in a manner that might feel systematic if that impulse too had not been rejected as too worldly. In fact, although the film carefully chronicles the textures of its characters' lives, it does so almost entirely in their moments of repose. The inertia of the film's action sequences feels calculated, the sign of the movie's tone of detached curiosity—sometimes tender, sometimes doleful. Although the movie carries the force of subdued conviction, it's difficult at first to locate that conviction, because the film has little interest in exploring the usual subjects or provoking the ordinary audience responses typical of the police-procedural genre. It's a cop movie steeped in stillness.

The film's dramatic situation is rooted in a casually audacious fiction. A tightly knit group of cops migrates from New York City to a burg across the river: Garrison, New Jersey—"population 1280," a road

Sylvester Stallone as Freddy Heflin in *Cop Land.*

sign informs us in an offhanded and uncharacteristically sly nod to the title of a Jim Thompson thriller about a criminal sheriff, filmed by Bertrand Tavernier as *Coup de Torchon*, a film which in its dour, quiet style is an important forerunner of *Cop Land*. In Garrison, the cops stake out territory to live apart from the depredations of the city while continuing collectively to manipulate networks of corruption from a safe distance, running drugs for the mob. A title informs us at the end of the film, if we weren't aware of it already, of the fictive status of this central conceit. In fact, New York police officers are required to live within the city limits. This is no small point, for it reveals the insularity of the film's vision of the contemporary American sociocultural landscape.

A pivotal plot event is an instance of racial violence at the beginning of the film. An unseasoned, hotheaded cop known as Superboy shoots two black men in a highway skirmish, then feigns suicide with the aid of his cronies to escape investigation, fleeing back to Garrison. But the movie's interest in the causes or effects of racial violence is so limited that a few scenes that would be crucial in a more conventional piece are rendered almost completely opaque in this film. For example, we get a glimpse of a black spokesperson decrying the media emphasis on the cop's suicide over the deaths of these "black children," and the comically inappropriate designation of the murdered punks is presented in feyly broad, sourly satirical terms. The moment seems here less indicative, however, of the paradoxically hysterical intellectual complacency of DePalma's film than it does of a sort of committed indifference to the sociology of current realities in Mangold's film. The film is not oblivious of racial politics, but its account of the genesis of corruption does not reside in the standard versions of urban anomie. The vision of the city in *Cop Land* is largely free of the fulminating Scorsesean moral horror or the virulent Schraderesque disgust one finds in a film like *Taxi Driver*, in part because Mangold is interested in the image of the metropolis only insofar as it sets into relief the meditation on private consciousness and small-town torpor that are the film's true concerns. In *Cop Land*, New York isn't a circle-of-hell or a pervasive state-of-being, the oppressive projection of a dankly morbid consciousness, but just a place you look at from across the river; and if the city is thus deprived of the infernal aspect it is routinely granted in such films, it is also thereby denied the geeky mythic grandeur or the lame-brained romance so typical of lesser manifestations of the genre—*Night Falls on Manhattan*, say, or the remake of *Kiss of Death*.

A quality of obliquity in the narrative's construction defuses any real sense of urgency in the film's cop-movie theatrics. (The one later scene involving careening police cars and frenzied officers running in

Peter Berg (center) and Arthur J. Nascarella (right).

all directions feels totally obligatory and, by that point in the film, decidedly out of place.) During an early scene of exposition, Heflin glances out the precinct window and sees a mother drive away with her kid's toy, a stuffed green turtle, on the roof of her van. This collateral set-up pays off later, but it functions at the time as a mark of the eccentricity of the movie's construction, its abiding concern with sidewise detail. Again and again Mangold displaces the drama of a given scene with such seemingly peripheral observation, or neutralizes volatility by angling a scene through the perspective of a calm or marginal observer—usually the doggedly passive Heflin. The distancing effect of such strategies enables a double focus on the cop-movie material, potentially satisfying the viewer who wants that but also allowing the gradual emergence of the movie's real subjects in the margins.

With like obliquity, Mangold's previous film told the story of an overweight restaurant owner (Pruitt Taylor Vince) in love with a beautiful waitress (Liv Tyler). Recognizing the hopelessness of this desire, he doesn't even try to articulate it to anyone, and as a result his inner life grows so remote even to himself that when his mother dies he doesn't tell anyone about that either. It's a film with a deep reserve of feeling for the unspoken and a hushed, evanescent atmosphere of delicacy—you watch it breathlessly, the way you'd watch a lovely, tiny bird that might take flight at the slightest movement. It's filled with Ozu-like cutaway-shots to transfixing sky-scapes or inserted nonnarrative tableaux with a formalized, still-life quality, and the fragility of the film's texture derives from the balance between such techniques and a methodical observation of the operations of diurnal ritual in characters' lives.

As *Heavy* demonstrated, Mangold's keenest feelings as a director appear to be for the textures and the rhythms of small-town life, and the conceit of *Cop Land* allows Mangold to play those textures and rhythms against the more conventional materials of the police-procedural action-adventure film. In its treatment of these themes, the earlier movie concerns the relation between states of transfixedness and states of fixation. The promise of spiritual escape in *Heavy* is predicated on an arrested emotional condition—and the film is interested in both the promise and the condition—that makes escape finally impossible. The movie's main characters are constantly discovered in day-dreamy postures of concentration—mooning at the sky, or looking at photos of one another—which are nearly indistinguishable from their moments of distraction, as they gape at TV screens or swap banal small talk. In the middle of the night, they park at an airport and watch planes take off, and in an inspired lyric gesture, Mangold refuses to show the planes (except in the film's first and last shots, where we see distant planes in vacant skies with no clear observer), showing in these moments only the reflections of their lights on the car windows or playing on the awe-stricken, upturned faces, stunned with pleasure, of the watchers whose hopeless aerial aspirations are stoked by the dazzlement of what they see and we do not. Through such poetic counterpoint, the scenes manage simultaneously to convey wonder and lack. The restaurant owner fantasizes saving the waitress from drowning, and the fantasy soon takes on the aura of a familiar hallucination. With its pensive gravity, the movie carefully shows how what is obsessive shades over into what is quotidian.

Cop Land has a different feeling, but it's surprisingly not as different as one might expect, and it shares a number of concerns with the earlier film while presenting them in a more literalized, plot-bound form. The movie deals with secret maneuvers and covert operations, but unlike more standard cop movies, it provides next to no exposition for the viewer, letting the secrets emerge by implication rather than explication. Even when all the characters are in on something—the plot to hide Superboy, the assorted entanglements and adulteries of the cops and their wives—the viewer is often left out, left to fit the pieces together through accumulation. The film's closest connection to *Heavy* is through Stallone's character, Heflin. Prevented from being a New York cop by deafness in one ear sustained in his youth during the heroic rescue of a drowning woman, Heflin lumbers through the daily routines of small-town sheriff-hood with a blank, amiable obliviousness, stopping repeatedly to gaze across the river at the city with the same kind of distracted concentration with which the characters in *Heavy* inhabit their lives. Constantly shadowed by the looming cityscape, the town of Garrison becomes an archetypal image of unfulfilled aspiration. Simply by bringing them together, *Cop Land* exposes the dual (and competing) myths of small-town America as at once the stronghold of clean living and pure values and the repository of crushed hopes and abandoned dreams, the haven of those who couldn't cut it in the big time.

The emotional textures of delusion, self-aggrandizement, and failed aspiration are the film's real interest, and just about every star performance in the film surprises us by revealing some new aspect of

Sylvester Stallone and Ray Liotta.

these textures. Having assembled such a constellation—Stallone, Robert DeNiro, Harvey Keitel, Ray Liotta—Mangold arranges the stars into a genuine ensemble instead of an aggregate of disconnected star turns. He doesn't do this by asking them to play against type. In some ways, indeed, the performances of the most familiar actors here play like mildly restrained pastiches of their previous roles. Keitel brings to his part the self-important, slightly philistine leisure-suited smoothness of his recent gangster roles with a submerged self-hatred which has associations that go back to his performance in *Fingers* (1978). Ray Liotta, meanwhile, incorporates his trademark coiled, desperate anger with an impatient humaneness. DeNiro as an Internal Affairs officer draws on something of the righteous moral solemnity that has cropped up in some of his recent performances, like the one in *Sleepers*, but he gives it a spin with residual echoes of, say, his Rupert Pupkin from *The King of Comedy*, sporting a 70s haircut, polyester blazers, and a shaggy mustache, and giving a sing-songy derision to some of his intonations, as when he tells Stallone, "You bleeeew it!"

It may be simply our familiarity with these actors in Scorsese movies that enables them to gel here, but the self-referential quality of the acting allows the incorporation of others into the ensemble so that even Stallone, who is in some ways cast against type, appears to be not so much departing radically from his usual persona as he is returning to some of the attitudes of his mid-1970s film performances. There is a kind of consistency in this ensemble that comes in part from the mosaic quality of the movie's structure, setting lots of subplots in motion but not granting real primacy or giving sustained attention to any subplot at any one time. In larger part, though, this consistency comes from the decision to make Stallone the mutable center of the ensemble. The result is that, because we see the other performances continually as they play off Stallone's less expressive performance, their performances are toned down by Stallone's function as a foil, and all the actors seem to be doing the same thing, geared toward the same end.

Stallone's performance can't exactly be called restrained, though its rhetoric is that of understatement, because you don't really feel there's anything that would be coming through if it were not being held back. It's a little like watching some of Marilyn Monroe's performances, especially the later ones, in *Some Like It Hot* or *The Misfits*, where Monroe's palpable effort to remember what she had been told to do in front of the camera translated into an ineffable, clumsily ethereal vulnerability. Stallone is capable of achieving nuances in the role: the way his voice breaks in a scene with Annabella Sciorra playing the woman he has saved, for instance, or the paltry

bravado he musters when he tells a group of schoolkids to move along "before I kick your ass." But the poignance of the performance clearly comes less from the performance itself than from the way the director uses it; some of the effects Mangold gets this way could almost be called Bressonian, and the irrevocably alienated quality of the final seige links it as surely to *L'Argent* as to *Taxi Driver*.

When Heflin realizes Superboy is still alive and decides to bring him in, the movie might have turned up the emotional thermostat, taken an urgent turn toward the thematics of redemption, as in Scorsese. But Mangold uses Stallone's performance to insure that the film remains focused instead on the lassitude of inevitable failure. Stallone walks through the final shootout like the Terminator, and the showdown itself is robotic and without volition, like something out of Fritz Lang. Despite the film's overriding concern with interiority, it has little concern with the dynamics of epiphanic insight, and its end brings no redemption. The explanatory aftermath provided by DeNiro's voice-over is notably perfunctory, and the last sequence shows Heflin still gazing across the river with what can by this time no longer be called yearning. Stallone's performance is a remarkable found object, beautifully used: it is not only *about* absence but, in crucial ways, it *enacts* that condition, illustrates it, making the film's meditation on oblivion all the more piercing. The blankness of Stallone's final look, itself evanescent, not lingered over, feels emotionally wrenching only in memory, after the film is over. It is then that you realize the film has been about not the sadness of unfulfilled desire, but about the sorrow of desire that persists after its origin is lost, when it no longer matters whether the object of desire—the ubiquitous city across the river, or the woman the empty-faced man might once have loved—vanishes or remains.

■ James Morrison teaches film in the English Department at North Carolina State University, and is the author of *Passport to Hollywood: Hollywood Films, European Directors*, forthcoming from SUNY Press.

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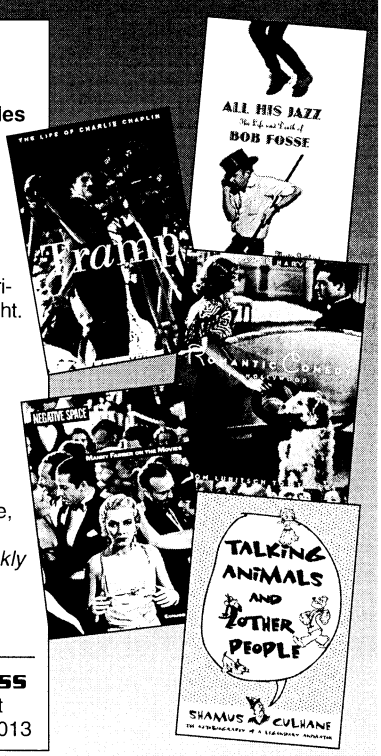

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Annual Film Quarterly Film Book Survey Part I

Australian National Cinema

By Tom O'Regan. London: Routledge, 1996. $49.95 cloth; $18.95 paper.

The Australian film industry has been in a difficult position since its revival in the early 70s with an infusion of government monies following years of local activism. Despite consistent worldwide popularity, Australian films are frequently compared to more amply budgeted and "superior" Hollywood and British films, which have established reputations and worldwide market niches. These films often eclipse (and are preferred to) indigenous films in Australian theaters where American films predominate. Yet Australian films are frequently regarded as "foreign" in North American and European markets, thereby lacking the cultural and aesthetic allure, as well as the "protection" afforded by foreign language films. Further, though the Australian film industry generates approximately 20 films per year, its population of 18 million does not support the local industry, so Australian films are dependent on overseas markets where they are clearly at a distinct disadvantage.

Tom O'Regan focuses on Australian cinema as a case study in this larger international economic and cultural context in *Australian National Cinema*, his ambitious, highly informative, and intricately researched analysis which examines the last 25 years of industry development (including sections on pre-1970 films). Right away, O'Regan acknowledges the difficulty of organizing and understanding films representing such a diverse and complex multi-culture: native Aborigines, white Australians of European descent, including the British isles and the Continent—Greeks, Italians, Spanish—as well as an increasing Asian population (Vietnamese, Filipino, and Chinese).

Further, as O'Regan reminds us, Australian cinema has also been strongly influenced by Hollywood (and to a lesser extent, European art cinema). Filmmakers are often scorned by Australian critics and historians for incorporating overseas models (particularly American) which (they argue) overshadow and undervalue indigenous culture. Yet one of O'Regan's major purposes in this work is to celebrate the diversity of Australian cinema, that is "revalue" rather than "devalue" it: "to demonstrate how Australian cinema is a hybrid assemblage of elements that are continually being improvised, combined and recombined; and to develop a critical ethics appropriate to this situation" (p. 9). One of the many pleasures of *Australian Cinema* is O'Regan's eclectic approach: he cites historians, semioticians, cultural and film critics, and filmmakers—which brings rich levels of analysis to his impressive repertoire of films.

O'Regan's book is divided into three parts: "Making a National Cinema"—Australian cinema in the larger context of and compared to other national cinemas; "Making a Distinct Cinema"—the qualities that make this indigenous cinema unique and individual; and "Problematizing Australian Cinema"—a detailed analysis of the deeper structures of Australian society that translate into film.

Part I is a very informative analysis of the role that Australia plays in local and international markets as a "medium-sized cinema"—primarily state-supported via low budgets without extensive production facilities. As

O'Regan notes, Australian films face the same problems as American independents in financing and distribution, yet the industry can produce sleepers which can count in North America and beyond as "dominant entertainment fare": *Breaker Morant*, *Muriel's Wedding*, *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*. O'Regan notes the special role of festivals for Australian films, the primary viewing place where filmmakers hope to generate strong word of mouth and spur sales to distributors worldwide (Cannes was the lucrative premiere for *Priscilla*, and Sundance launched *Shine*.)

In addition, O'Regan examines in detail the various ways that Hollywood cinema has informed Australian films, in his words, the ways that Australian films successfully "negotiate" with American cinema. For example, on a generic level, the Western has influenced *The Man from Snowy River*, the road picture *Mad Max*, the musical *Strictly Ballroom*. A useful addition to this section would have been a summary of the Australian/American political/economic relationship since World War II that would have provided a larger framework for O'Regan's discussion of Australian films. For example, postwar defense agreements with the United States necessitated Australian participation in Vietnam, a highly unpopular war, which not only split the country, but fueled a rebirth of nationalism and pride in indigenous culture (including films) in the 1960s.

In Part II, O'Regan organizes Australian films via a variety of categories, such as indigenous genres, thematics, and style. For example, he includes the bushranger film, the thriller, woman-centered narrative, and Australian melodrama. This section has some minor omissions. A working definition of the bushranger film would be useful for readers who are not entirely familiar with this historical term, as would a more complete explanation of the links between the bushranger film and the Australian western. Further, the group of films in the woman-centered narrative, including *My Brilliant Career*, *The Getting of Wisdom*, and *The Piano*, is problematic, as these films are quite different in terms of historical context, thematics, even country (*The Piano* is set in New Zealand). A more fully developed section on the ocker is also needed. This was a deliberately commercial yet very Australian genre that burst forth in the early 70s in the aforementioned wave of spirited nationalism, featuring crude and vulgar males, as in *Stork* and *The Adventures of Barry McKenzie*.

O'Regan shifts gears in his subsequent more theoretical chapter on cultural transfer theory derived from semiotitian Yuri Lotman. This section serves to summarize O'Reagan's prior chapters, which detailed the ways that Australian cinema appropriated Hollywood and other cinemas, and also charts the ways that Australian cinema, when successfully exported into foreign theaters, can serve as a model in its own right.

O'Regan's prelude to Part III, "A Distinct Place in the Cinema," focuses squarely on the qualities that make Australian culture and cinema different, and serves as a segue into final chapters, which analyze the inherent structures of Australian culture and society (race, gender, class, ethnicities). This chapter goes beyond the more formal qualities of genre and image, its strategy emanating from film/cultural critic Meaghan Morris's cultural transfer theory of positive unoriginality which, like Lotman's, acknowledges the critical role of import cultures in shaping native cultures. Morris (and O'Regan) however, credit a receiving culture such as Australia in being assertively patriotic, yet frequently ironic in presenting and valuing Australian voice and text. Thus, Australian disempowerment is glorified and martyred at the hands of the cruel British in *Gallipoli*, or, in a humorous and subversive light, Mick Dundee in *Crocodile Dundee* debunks the myth of the Australian bush hero, then triumphantly resurrects himself in New York City, civilizing urban America.

The final section of O'Regan's book, "Problematizing Australian Cinema," examines the deep structures of Australian society and culture. This is a rich and illuminating section drawing on and incorporating the works of cultural theorists/historians Homi Bhabha, Sneja Gunew, and Fazal Rivzi. In "Problematizing the Social," O'Regan uses binaries or "cleavages" that frequently erupt into conflict in films: urban/rural (*Muriel's Wedding*); youth/old age (*Spider and Rose*); heterosexual/homosexual (*The Sum of Us*); aborigine/white (*The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*).

"Problematizing Nationhood" is a historical and contemporary analysis of the nation's ethnicities, and not only reinforces the fact that Australia is one of the most ethnically diverse nations in the world, but also demonstrates the enormous potential within Australia to produce films that represent and reflect all these cultural entities. Yet, unfortunately, as O'Regan notes, "Australian popular symbolic screen culture . . . continues to be Eurocentric in its outlooks and norms . . . foreground[ing] an ethnically unmarked and non-diasporically defined Australian identity" (331). Perhaps his assessment is meant to serve as a challenge to government funding agencies as well as to upcoming and working filmmakers.

In *Australian National Cinema*, Tom O'Regan builds on the pioneering work done by Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka in *The Screening of Australia: Anatomy of a Film Industry* (1987), Volume I (the structure and financing practices of the industry) and *The Screening of Australia: Anatomy of a National Cinema* (1988), Volume II (an examination of the films). Both works are updated in *The Invisible Industry* (1988). O'Regan's multitextured analysis of a unique Australian

society and film culture with its inclusion of the larger context of international forces that impact Australian cinema not only has produced a fine study, but is also an excellent model for further case studies on national cinemas.

■ Susan Barber teaches at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles and is writing a book on Australian Cinema.

Between the Sheets, In the Streets

Queer, Lesbian, Gay Documentary

Edited by Chris Holmlund and Cynthia Fuchs. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997. $54.95 cloth; $21.95 paper.

While most documentary anthologies include at least one article concerned with queer/lesbian/gay works, and most anthologies on queer/lesbian/gay film and video include some discussion of documentaries, there is, as yet, no book or anthology which makes a comprehensive attempt to identify the contours and investigate the history and content of this category. Chris Holmlund and Cynthia Fuchs, the editors of *Between the Sheets, In the Streets: Queer, Lesbian, Gay Documentary*, do not set out to accomplish this, either. The anthology does, however, touch on most of the theoretical and representational issues around documentary that are raised in academic discourse, those which cannot be resolved but only continually worked through: the generic and historical category of queer/gay/lesbian documentary; the notion of difference and the role of identity politics; the intersection of personal and political; the question of what it is to document a "reality," as well as questions of reception and affect.

The editors and all the authors, in some way, attempt to come to grips with the importance and the limitations of visibility for queer/gay/lesbian political action, self-recognition, solidarity, and collective memory and to acknowledge the particular efficacy of documentary for these projects. Nevertheless, there is little that ties the thirteen essays together as a whole. The book makes no systematic attempt to define or comprehend a body of work called queer/lesbian/gay documentary, nor is it compiled to systematically explore where we've been and where we are on the relevant issues set out in the introduction. Instead, the anthology is organized into sections which slightly shift the categories of inquiry that the introduction has asserted are still important to scholarship about queer/gay/lesbian representations. These categories are, therefore, treated much like editors wish to treat categories of identity: as "interwoven, often disjunctive . . . situational, provisional, and rhetorical rather than essential." Many of these articles would seem to fit as easily into one section as another. It is left to the reader, if she so desires, to determine what is at stake in each section and synthesize accordingly. As a result, this book as a whole would not be as useful as a textbook as it would be for the "suggestion, provocation, and encouragement" of those committed to social change, whether that be through artistic or intellectual activism.

The first section, entitled "Markers," explores various aspects of queer identity as a function of "location," a versatile marker which can be liberatory and also restrictive, often organized around a binary. The three articles both use and problematize such categories as sexual identity (mainstream/margins), geography (north/south or urban/rural), and age (youth/adult) respectively, as markers of location. Ronald Gregg's article, "Queer Representation and Oregon's 1992 Anti-Gay Ballot Measure: Measuring the Politics of Mainstreaming," looks at queer self-censorship which has produced documentaries aimed at straight audiences that strategically omit representations of queer sexuality or behavior thought to be controversial. If, as Chuck Kleinhens has argued elsewhere, what counts as radical documentary is a function of the political and historical moment, can representations which seek to elide difference, to construct queer sexuality within a model of heterosexual norms in order to accomplish a crucial political goal, be considered radical? Gregg provides a thoughtful analysis for those who may be caught up in such struggles in the future.

An opposite but related question is treated by Erika Suderburg in her article, "Real/Young/TV Queer." Does the act of framing difference, of representing a marginal, heretofore invisible subculture in a mainstream media format such as television inevitably normalize it, sell it out? The article focuses on young, queer identities in three made-for-television documentaries about American "families": *An American Family* (1971), *The Real World* (1992–present), and *The Ride* (1995). Suderburg is ultimately led to the same question asked by Gregg: "Is the 'normalization' of queerdom either instant death or the only path to power?" This examination of a very small subgenre, TV documentaries, nevertheless allows her to demonstrate how "the binary between the power of visibility and the impotency of invisibility" is a false one, as there are power and limitations inherent in both locations.

The next section, called "Memories," includes discussions of past documentaries and documentaries which represent the past. Included here, and well placed in the center of the book, is an article which specifically takes

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on the project of charting some of the history of queer/lesbian/gay documentary: Thomas Waugh's "Walking on Tippy Toes: Lesbian and Gay Liberation Documentary of the Post-Stonewall Period 1969–86." Waugh has been attending to the development of what we now recognize as queer/lesbian/gay documentaries since their beginnings and is in a unique position to create some perspective, to identify broad movements and transitional moments in aesthetics, issues of identity, and the role of performance. He organizes his essay around this last issue, arguing that early (1970s) documentaries utilized rather "artificial and hyperbolic performance discourses" (scripts, dramatizations, re-enactments), while more contemporary documentaries are characterized by a collaborative performance style in which the social actants show their awareness of the camera and take responsibility for their own presentation. In this way, the trajectory of performance styles in queer documentary has repeated that of the documentary genre in general, the latter worked out by Waugh in previously published articles. The current article delivers some useful insight into the reception, political efficacy, and pleasures of the performance styles of early queer documentaries which serve to recontextualize and shed new light on contemporary documentary practices.

I found the "Marriage and Mourning"section to be the most internally conversant. It examines the ways in which viewing context and community inflect the meaning and impact of intimate, personal portrayals of love and death. Is the documentation of emotional "truths" necessarily personal and particular, or are they recognized and made general in the process of reception by an audience? How is this question contingent upon the particular audience viewing the work? For whom have these documentary realities been constructed? Chris Holmlund examines these questions through the "dyke docs" of Sadie Benning and Su Friedrich, skillfully utilizing and expanding our understanding of the categories of autobiography and ethnography in the process. Beverly Seckinger and Janet Jakobsen's essay on *Silverlake Life* nicely complements Holmlund's by investigating the process of creating subjective experience as shared experience as well as the new possibilities and risks created by the radical meeting of Us and Them through personal documentary. Constructing something of a limit test for these questions in the context of an anthology on documentary, Justin Wyatt argues that Derek Jarman's *The Last of England*, usually read as a piece of experimental, avant-garde cinema with post-apocalyptic sensibilities, can in fact be read as a personal and historical construction of gay life. Specifically (for a viewer who has read Jarman's published journals), the film, with its juxtaposition of home movie footage and disconnected scenes depicting alienation and destruction, becomes a gay perspective on the family and "an extended metaphor for AIDS." Considering the work of Benning, Friedrich, and *Silverlake Life* and *The Last of England* together productively extends our definition of documentary and our understanding of the extent to which it is an agreement between filmmaker and audience.

The last section, "Mirrors," seems to present two kinds of "reflections": the reflexivity of documentaries which, through their formal elements, question documentary representation itself, and documentaries which seek to reflect different facets of queerness back to queer audiences. Lynda Goldstein looks at how performative documentary shorts by women of color position, and are positioned by, white women—those in front of the camera and in the audience. The complexity and slipperiness of the "queer" landscape is traversed by Cynthia Fuchs through her formal analysis of "the dilemma of identity in and as representation" in *Without You I'm Nothing* (John Boskovish's faux documentary starring Sandra Bernhard), Jennie Livingston's *Paris Is Burning*, and two Cheryl Dunye videos. Chris Straayer's "Transgender Mirrors: Queering Sexual Difference" presents material covered in her book *Deviant Eyes, Deviant Bodies* regarding *Juggling Gender*, a documentary about Jennifer Miller, a bearded lesbian, and *OUTLAW*, about Leslie Feinberg, a transgendered lesbian. While the latter essay is a valuable entry on transgender, a small but developing area of academic discourse, it was disappointing not to find some fresh perspectives on this subcategory of queer documentary that has received so little analysis.

In fact, the collection of articles here fails, overall, to open up the category of "queer" or even gesture at its scope. What the anthology does contain, however, is a creatively organized group of generally well-written articles, finished off with a film and videography compiled by Linda McAfee that should prove to be a convenient tool for course design and programming.

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The Birth of Whiteness

Race and the Emergence of U.S. Cinema

Edited by Daniel Bernardi. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1996. $50.00 cloth; $18.95 paper.

In recent years the accumulating body of work in whiteness studies has crossed a number of disciplinary boundaries, to be informed by the work of sociologists,

on the project of charting some of the history of queer/lesbian/gay documentary: Thomas Waugh's "Walking on Tippy Toes: Lesbian and Gay Liberation Documentary of the Post-Stonewall Period 1969–86." Waugh has been attending to the development of what we now recognize as queer/lesbian/gay documentaries since their beginnings and is in a unique position to create some perspective, to identify broad movements and transitional moments in aesthetics, issues of identity, and the role of performance. He organizes his essay around this last issue, arguing that early (1970s) documentaries utilized rather "artificial and hyperbolic performance discourses" (scripts, dramatizations, re-enactments), while more contemporary documentaries are characterized by a collaborative performance style in which the social actants show their awareness of the camera and take responsibility for their own presentation. In this way, the trajectory of performance styles in queer documentary has repeated that of the documentary genre in general, the latter worked out by Waugh in previously published articles. The current article delivers some useful insight into the reception, political efficacy, and pleasures of the performance styles of early queer documentaries which serve to recontextualize and shed new light on contemporary documentary practices.

I found the "Marriage and Mourning"section to be the most internally conversant. It examines the ways in which viewing context and community inflect the meaning and impact of intimate, personal portrayals of love and death. Is the documentation of emotional "truths" necessarily personal and particular, or are they recognized and made general in the process of reception by an audience? How is this question contingent upon the particular audience viewing the work? For whom have these documentary realities been constructed? Chris Holmlund examines these questions through the "dyke docs" of Sadie Benning and Su Friedrich, skillfully utilizing and expanding our understanding of the categories of autobiography and ethnography in the process. Beverly Seckinger and Janet Jakobsen's essay on *Silverlake Life* nicely complements Holmlund's by investigating the process of creating subjective experience as shared experience as well as the new possibilities and risks created by the radical meeting of Us and Them through personal documentary. Constructing something of a limit test for these questions in the context of an anthology on documentary, Justin Wyatt argues that Derek Jarman's *The Last of England*, usually read as a piece of experimental, avant-garde cinema with post-apocalyptic sensibilities, can in fact be read as a personal and historical construction of gay life. Specifically (for a viewer who has read Jarman's published journals), the film, with its juxtaposition of home movie footage and disconnected scenes depicting alienation and destruction, becomes a gay perspective on the family and "an extended metaphor for AIDS." Considering the work of Benning, Friedrich, and *Silverlake Life* and *The Last of England* together productively extends our definition of documentary and our understanding of the extent to which it is an agreement between filmmaker and audience.

The last section, "Mirrors," seems to present two kinds of "reflections": the reflexivity of documentaries which, through their formal elements, question documentary representation itself, and documentaries which seek to reflect different facets of queerness back to queer audiences. Lynda Goldstein looks at how performative documentary shorts by women of color position, and are positioned by, white women—those in front of the camera and in the audience. The complexity and slipperiness of the "queer" landscape is traversed by Cynthia Fuchs through her formal analysis of "the dilemma of identity in and as representation" in *Without You I'm Nothing* (John Boskovish's faux documentary starring Sandra Bernhard), Jennie Livingston's *Paris Is Burning*, and two Cheryl Dunye videos. Chris Straayer's "Transgender Mirrors: Queering Sexual Difference" presents material covered in her book *Deviant Eyes, Deviant Bodies* regarding *Juggling Gender*, a documentary about Jennifer Miller, a bearded lesbian, and *OUTLAW*, about Leslie Feinberg, a transgendered lesbian. While the latter essay is a valuable entry on transgender, a small but developing area of academic discourse, it was disappointing not to find some fresh perspectives on this subcategory of queer documentary that has received so little analysis.

In fact, the collection of articles here fails, overall, to open up the category of "queer" or even gesture at its scope. What the anthology does contain, however, is a creatively organized group of generally well-written articles, finished off with a film and videography compiled by Linda McAfee that should prove to be a convenient tool for course design and programming.

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The Birth of Whiteness

Race and the Emergence of U.S. Cinema

Edited by Daniel Bernardi. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1996. $50.00 cloth; $18.95 paper.

In recent years the accumulating body of work in whiteness studies has crossed a number of disciplinary boundaries, to be informed by the work of sociologists,

anthropologists, literary scholars, historians, and others. Drawing upon the seminal contributions of authors such as David Roediger (*The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*), Ruth Frankenberg (*White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness*), and Richard Dyer ("White"), scholarly articles theorizing whiteness as a social construction through a variety of modes of study have recently proliferated. Richard Dyer's forthcoming *White* and Mike Hill's *Whiteness: A Critical Reader* promise to continue the trend, while "The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness," the conference held recently at the University of California, Berkeley, seemed to herald the arrival of whiteness as an emergent subject of academic inquiry. To the list of contributions in this burgeoning field we may now add Daniel Bernardi's useful anthology on race and silent cinema.

Concerned with the way in which cinema "represents and narrates race" (3), the contributors to *The Birth of Whiteness* address themselves to a wide variety of genres and performers in early film, considering the cinema of Oscar Micheaux, Sessue Hayakawa, Robert Flaherty, D.W. Griffith, and Cecil B. DeMille, among others. They shed new light on such canonical texts as *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) and *Nanook of the North* (1922) while also excavating and persuasively arguing for the importance of more obscure films such as *The Birth of a Race* (1918), *The Forbidden City* (1918), and the Jack Johnson fight films of 1908-1910. The collected essays cumulatively serve to make a strong case for the race consciousness of early cinema.

Organized into four sections, "Representation and Resistance (?)," "White Nationalism," "The Fear of Miscegenation," and "The Colonial Imagination," *The Birth of Whiteness* explores in each a different facet of cinematic racial practice. The first segment is devoted to analysis of dominant representations of African-American and Asian-American identities in the emergent Hollywood cinema, as well as attempts to counter those representations. Thomas Cripps' article, "The Making of *The Birth of a Race*: The Emerging Politics of Identity in Silent Movies," is illustrative of the concerns in this first section as he discusses the production history of *The Birth of a Race*, the film which was intended to counter the racism of D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation.* Cripps usefully details the debates over what elements a progressive vision of black history and culture should include, and how ultimately the film's narrative was subverted to take on meanings more in the interest of white American culture during the advent of World War I. In the end, Cripps concludes, the production of *The Birth of a Race* at an early moment in film history illustrates how African Americans "had drawn upon the cultural inventory available to them, such as the idea of progress and enhanced status in return for service; [and] had used an international crisis and war as the occasion for renegotiating some of the worst conditions that oppressed them" (53).

The book's second section, "White Nationalism," takes up the interrelations between conceptions of whiteness and American national identity. Here, Dan Streible thoughtfully analyzes the fight films of the African-American heavyweight boxing champion Jack Johnson, one of the earliest forms of African-American cinema. Streible showcases the issue of Johnson's "problematic celebrity" by tracing the circulation (and in some cases, suppression) of the films which documented his spectacular defeats of white fighters. In this fascinating account, Streible shows how the films served to advance race pride among audiences of color by offering powerful visual documentation of images of black power and white vulnerability in the space of the boxing ring, a traditional arena for the display of empowered whiteness. Drawing from a wide variety of sources for his evidence (including reviews, photographs, and popular press cartoons), Streible convincingly documents the reception of the films among white and non-white audiences alike.

The third section, "The Fear of Miscegenation," turns to the depiction of interracial relationships in early cinema. Among the strongest work in the volume, Chon Noriega's sharp analysis here of the texts of *Ramona* (in particular the Helen Hunt Jackson novel and the D.W. Griffith film made for Biograph) details how the fictionalization of a figure who symbolized miscegenation and the necessary displacement of racial others from the land evolved both a historical and ideological usefulness, ultimately coming to serve as a myth of origin which both romanticized and rationalized twentieth-century white settlement of the West. As Noriega observes, cinema's reorientation around a middle-class audience worked in tandem with an adaptational process that defused elements of social protest in the novel, and moved the film into a touristic/nostalgic register. The film thus came to mark "the appropriation and romanticization of *californio* history [which] bespoke the inevitable succession of superior 'races' in the pursuit of higher forms of social organization" (211).

In the same section, Gina Marchetti provides a rich study of the complexities of Asian representation in early film in her article, "Tragic and Transcendent Love in *The Forbidden City*." Arguing that many silent films "used the device of the parallel love story both to uphold and condemn the racial/sexual status quo within the same narrative" (257), Marchetti shows how films such as *The Forbidden City* (1918) facilitated identification with a sacrificial, feminine "Asia," while legitimizing the values of Western patriarchy. Cogent textual analysis of this late World War I film supports the author's argument that it works at the level of political allegory, shoring up ideas

about the value of American governance and rationalizing U.S. imperialism, while also enacting those same processes representationally and institutionally. Marchetti recognizes that "At a time when Hollywood seriously began to see itself as a global enterprise, with a need to sell its products abroad as well as at home, *The Forbidden City* provides a fantasy in which America appears as the benevolent patriarch abroad" (269–270).

The book's last section, "The Colonial Imagination," takes up issues of colonial and commercial power in early film. Like Marchetti, Roberta E. Pearson is concerned with complicating the assumption that the silent cinema simply and straightforwardly demonized non-white races and ethnicities. Rather, as she observes, "the silent screen reflected and refracted the complex and contradictory position and representation of Native Americans within contemporary U.S. society and culture" (275). In "The Revenge of Rain-In-The-Face? Or, Custers and Indians on the Silent Screen," Pearson investigates the images of Native Americans and of George Armstrong Custer across a number of texts, revealing that the positions of aggressor and victim were not always clearly differentiated or static in the numerous silent films which depicted the Battle of the Little Big Horn. Pearson historicizes the battle and its relation to an early twentieth-century audience for whom it signified both the closing of the frontier and the defense of white culture against "lesser" races (a timely concern in the midst of New Immigration which threatened to "contaminate" American whiteness). She closes by indicating the broad range of social, cultural, and industrial information that must necessarily shape our assessments of representation in the silent film era.

While *The Birth of Whiteness* unites film studies with critical studies of whiteness in a most welcome gesture, it is strongest in illuminating comparative definitions of whiteness rather than its internal contestations and hierarchies. The essays in the book focus upon representations of those groups who have been excluded from the privileges of whiteness (African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos, Native Americans) largely as a means of understanding the ideologies deployed to support and shield white hegemony. Bernardi acknowledges that "Though present since the founding of the Republic, the discourse of whiteness is nonetheless historical: a shifting and reforming system of meanings that, while consistently hierarchizing physiognomic and cultural difference, moves collectives of people up and down the racial privilege ladder" (105). He presents the essays in the anthology as "an initial step in filling the gap in film studies on the enduring legacy of race and whiteness in U.S. cinema" (9) Many of the authors in the collection take their cues implicitly or explicitly from Richard Dyer's and Toni Morrison's observations on the "everything-and-nothing" status of whiteness, its tendency to shroud itself in definitional obscurity while ruthlessly establishing that which is "not white." *The Birth of Whiteness* organizes itself around this same logic, and so there is scant attention here to the category of marginal or problematic whiteness occupied by such groups as Eastern Europeans, the Irish, Gypsies, and Jews. Although the volume gains considerably from its authors' attentiveness to studio and star histories, domestic and foreign policy, and broad-based social history, a more sustained attention to immigration as an overwhelmingly important intertext for the silent cinema seems in order. A corresponding analysis of the same phase of early cinema might scrutinize the period's numerous assimilation dramas and their depictions of ethnic hierarchy even where a superficial parity might seem to exist.

At the same time, this anthology offers a significant contribution in acknowledging whiteness as a structured and structuring category, and numerous essays in the volume shed light on the ideological implications of the depictions of race in early cinema for white and non-white audiences. *The Birth of Whiteness* has many strengths, particularly the ability of its essays both individually and collectively to pose a number of interesting questions about race, gender, class, and nation in the silent cinema, and in so doing, to considerably advance our understanding of this period of film history. Among its weaknesses is the lack of a more detailed and elaborated rationale for the various sections into which the essays are grouped, particularly as these designations sometimes seem arbitrary, as if certain essays might well have been placed in other sections.

The format and structure of *The Birth of Whiteness* make it easy to read—the book includes a carefully prepared bibliography, and most of the essays in the volume make good use of images to support the arguments advanced. While all of the pieces in the anthology appear in print for the first time, a number of them are excerpts from forthcoming books which will soon see publication. The authors' offerings in this collection can cause us to look with anticipation toward their forthcoming work.

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Charlie Chaplin and His Times

By Kenneth S. Lynn. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997. $34.50.

As a subject for a critical biography, Charlie Chaplin is simultaneously irresistible and forbidding. He is irresistible because he is one of the first and most enduring movie stars, because he quickly gained creative and financial control of his movies, because he invented such a fascinating series of comic films, because he experienced such a stormy personal life, and because his 40-year filmmaking career in the United States was such a rollercoaster ride of boom and bust. Yet he is equally forbidding as a subject: he left almost no correspondence; he frequently sought to imbue or hide his past with mythic stories; he was such a complex, mercurial, elusive figure; and, finally, it's simply ticklish to link a collaborative art like the movies to a single creator's life.

Thanks in part to his access to Chaplin's personal archives, David Robinson yielded to the temptation and, in 1985, published his insightful and informative *Chaplin: His Life and Art*. The biography offered a generous tribute to Chaplin's artistry and contained much new information about Chaplin's working methods and the production history of some of his films. Subsequent scholars writing on Chaplin have all been in Robinson's debt.

Now Kenneth S. Lynn, a Professor Emeritus of Johns Hopkins University, has also submitted to the lure. Lynn admits that over a half-decade ago he worried about committing himself to Chaplin, wondering if he dared "to devote a book-length study . . . to a master of wordless communication, with all its attendant ambiguities?" (9). Yet he overcame the doubt, and in *Charlie Chaplin and His Times* he offers the results of his substantial labors.

Trained in an American Studies tradition at Harvard, Lynn is perhaps best known for earlier books on Mark Twain, William Dean Howells, and Ernest Hemingway. His extensive scholarly work in American literature and culture from the end of the Civil War through World War Two has provided a useful background for one interested in approaching the enigmatic Chaplin.

Lynn's life of Chaplin has a number of strengths. First, it's not hagiography: sometimes Chaplin's films have been so seductive and Chaplin as a person so charming that biographers and critics have ignored his warts. Lynn doesn't. Second, it's clear the book was researched with great energy: the notes indicate that Lynn draws on the extensive secondary literature about Chaplin; on relevant works of American political and cultural history; on memoirs and autobiographies in which subjects recall their interactions with and impressions of Chaplin; and on interviews with people as diverse as Lita Gray and Sydney Chaplin, Oona O'Neill Chaplin's high school friends, and Attorney General James McGranery's widow and son. Third, Lynn's research and writing at times extends beyond Chaplin's life and work to encompass related contexts that seek to ground and illuminate the subject. He discusses, for example, working-class conditions and politics in England between 1909 and 1913; tramps in American culture in the two decades before Chaplin created his memorable persona; and vignettes of many people, like Max Linder, Max Eastman, Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, and Adolph Hitler, whose lives directly or indirectly intertwined with Chaplin's. Finally, Lynn is an engaging prose stylist, making the book enjoyable to read.

In assessing Lynn's portrait of Chaplin, let me emphasize two strands: Chaplin's childhood and Chaplin's politics. In his recent scholarship, like the Hemingway biography, Lynn has been drawn to biographical analysis that emphasizes the influence of childhood experience on an artist's later life and work. That continues here, for Lynn argues that Chaplin was ineluctably shaped by his unstable early childhood; he lacked a strong father figure after Charles Sr. early abandoned the family, and he only intermittently possessed a mother figure at all, given Hannah Chaplin's frequent hospitalizations. Lynn documents Hannah's medical and psychological difficulties well, but he also speculates—based in this case on no firm evidence—that Hannah resorted to prostitution at times to help support her sons. Chaplin's helplessness at being unable to help his mother placed him under "appalling" psychological pressures in his childhood, Lynn contends, and in a compelling formulation he writes,

> That his zestful spirit and drive to success were not broken by his ordeal is a tribute to his mental hardihood. But if he emerged unbroken from the treacherous world of his childhood, he was not unscarred. The least attractive characteristics of Chaplin the man—his self-pity, his anger, his cruelty, his mania for taking total control of the lives of young women who caught his eye—must have been gathering strength within him all the while (69).

Lynn draws on this strand to help explain Chaplin's many, usually unsuccessful, relationships with women throughout his Hollywood years, as well as to help us understand the depictions of women in many of his films.

Besides this emphasis on Chaplin's early relationship with his mother, Lynn also focuses on Chaplin's politics. I believe I'm fair in saying that, simply stated, Lynn finds Chaplin's politics naive and objectionable, and much of this strand of the book is intent on exploring Chaplin's relationship to Communists and Communism.

For example, Lynn reprints significant passages of a 1952 Immigration and Naturalization Service interview with Paul Crouch, who had been a Communist Party organizer in the Carolinas in the 1930s. Crouch told INS officials that CP official V.J. Jerome told him during the depression that Chaplin was a "member at large directly responsible to the Central Committee" (393). To his credit, Lynn raises some questions about Crouch's veracity, yet he seems intent on criticizing Chaplin's politics from the mid-1930s on, which makes his Chaplin appear more like a willing emigré or martyr in 1952 than a victim of McCarthyism, as he's more often (and, I think, more accurately) portrayed in recent scholarship. (Relying on Chaplin's friend and sometimes business manager Harry Crocker, Lynn even speculates that Chaplin may have been planning all along to leave the United States when he set sail for the London *Limelight* premiere in 1952.)

In approaching Chaplin's political views, I would prefer to emphasize Chaplin's strong anti-Fascism, a position which sometimes led him to cooperation with Communists and socialists, as it did many in the political left during the 1930s and World War II. I'd also stress Chaplin's consistant and dogged protection of his own private property—not least the rights to his films, which are still in the hands of the Chaplin estate. My differences with Lynn over Chaplin's political views may stem in part from the fact that he came to intellectual maturity during the early 1950s, which I suspect has shaped his understanding of Chaplin's politics, whereas my understanding has surely been shaped by the climate of a different era, the late 1960s and early 1970s—an era much more sympathetic to Chaplin's plight than the early 1950s. Yet I believe the evidence suggests that despite his flirtation with some people who had ties with Communism, Chaplin's politics were those of a passionate but not very sophisticated anti-Fascist, one who was enthused about and relatively engaged in politics from about 1940 to 1948 but who then retreated around 1950, when he realized how much his activities were damaging his career. When Lynn tries to make much more of Chaplin's Communist ties than that, his argument rests on shaky grounds.

Lynn tells us early that he particularly admires some of Chaplin's early shorts and the five Charlie features between *The Kid* and *Modern Times*, and that Chaplin's talkies don't match the earlier films despite some effective sequences in them (10). His discussions of the films don't often add much to what other commentators have already said about the movies, except in one area. Lynn sees Chaplin as a "profoundly autobiographical" filmmaker (11), and at times his comments in that realm offer fresh insights into Chaplin's films. Two examples should suffice. In his discussion of *City Lights*, Lynn suggests two roots for the millionaire's character. Behind his "insanely erratic behavior lay the shadow of Hannah Chaplin's," Lynn suggests, while in filling in the details of the millionaire's love of luxury and occasional fits of "lovelorn depression," Chaplin drew on his relationship with illustrator Ralph Barton, who would later commit suicide at age 40, not long after the opening of *City Lights*. In his discussion of *Limelight*, Lynn suggests that the primary model for the psychologically strained dancer Terry was Hannah Chaplin. Drawing on an observation by Claire Bloom, Lynn writes that the film's opening rescue scene draws its power from "the drastic, life-and-death drama in which Chaplin put into play his everlasting fantasy of rescuing his mother" (478), a fantasy that, in Lynn's view, often haunted the famous comedian.

On the other hand, I think that at times Lynn misreads or oversimplifies Chaplin's films. For example, the famous final sequence in *City Lights*, he argues, expresses that the "social gap" between the flower girl and the tramp is "unbridgeable" (337), whereas I'm more convinced by those commentators like Gerard Molyneaux who argue that the ending is ambiguous, leaving open the question of how the characters will react. Similarly, Lynn resorts to name-calling in his discussion of the final speech in *The Great Dictator*, calling it "flapdoodle" characterized by "left-wing utopianism" and "dreamy politics," then concludes the section by noting that the Communist Party in England put it out as a special pamphlet (407–08). Without defending the aesthetic wisdom of the speech or arguing for its internal coherence, I would rather, following Richard Pells in *Radical Visions and American Dreams*, link its rhetoric of "the people" to American cultural nationalism and popular front politics in the late 1930s. And some readers may also be disappointed that Lynn's discussion of the films, while stressing narrative and thematic concerns, gives almost no attention to the role of cinematic style in communicating meaning and evoking emotion.

Finally, although Lynn's biography doesn't supplant Robinson's, it does offer a different and darker—some may even feel less-than-generous—take on Chaplin. Yet the author's persistent research, his commitment to broad contextual scholarship in the American Studies tradition, and his lively writing all help make this a biography worth reading, arguing with, and contemplating. Future Chaplin scholars will need to weigh his perspective when they seek to understand the man George Bernard Shaw once labeled the only genius working in the movies.

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Cinematernity

Film, Motherhood, Genre

By Lucy Fischer. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996. $39.50 cloth; $14.95 paper.

If, as feminist film theory has demonstrated, the majority of cinematic narratives and cinematic representations have worked to marginalize and subject the figure of woman to patriarchal desire, a particular subset of women, mothers, has fared even worse. This treatment of "cinematernity" constitutes the subject matter of Lucy Fischer's insightful, thoroughly researched, and wide-ranging study. Taking examples from primitive and postmodern cinema, from classic Hollywood genres and feminist documentary, from Griffith to Almodóvar to Akerman, she demonstrates that Mother is spoken in a number of negative contexts by men, and that even daughters, using "progressive" nonfictional filmmaking techniques, tend to channel her voice through their chosen images rather than letting her speak, unmediated, on her own behalf.

Nor does Fischer confine her evidence merely to that provided in the films themselves, since her primary emphasis is on maternity rather than on cinema. She therefore treats filmic representations of motherhood as continuous with a large number of other cultural and literary discourses. Women's writing, both creative and critical, is always crucial to her arguments as she addresses theoretical assumptions by male theorists as disparate as Freud, Northrop Frye, and Jean Baudrillard. (Adrienne Rich becomes an especially valuable ally.) For this reason, *Cinematernity* will prove just as useful (if not more useful) for literary and women's studies as for film studies.

Beginning with a consideration of how metaphors of procreation permeate early theoretical pronouncements about the cinema, Fischer moves on in her next chapter, on the "trick film," to show how filmmakers in early cinema use male magicians to control the female subject and the occasional female magician to exorcize fears of maternal power. Informed by psychoanalytic theory, this is one of the strongest chapters, capped off when Fischer cites Méliès's "The Magic Lantern" (1903), which literalizes all those reproductive metaphors to reveal "the cinema as Man's device for procreating women" (53). That one strain of cinematernity concerns the efforts of men to wrest maternal power from woman will be picked up later in her chapters on film comedy and on the "postmodern film," *High Heels.*

The other focus of this chapter, the metaphorization of motherhood, dominates a reading of *Way Down East.* Fischer focuses particularly on its climactic rescue of "fallen woman" Anna Moore (Lillian Gish) from an ice floe in a raging river as a literalization of the language used to describe female passion and sexual transgression in the film's literary source, in Victorian and early twentieth-century social tracts, in Freudian theory, and in contemporary feminist criticism. She notes, for example, that "the vision of Anna, unconscious on the ice, literalizes Freud's notion of sexual 'anesthesia.' That she is almost killed by such 'frigidity' underscores his sense of its psychosocial peril" (65). Despite the apparently patriarchal conclusion, when Anna is rescued and tamed by David Bartlett, Fischer discerns a subversive streak in Anna, who generates a "heated female liquefaction of the solid masculine world" (68).

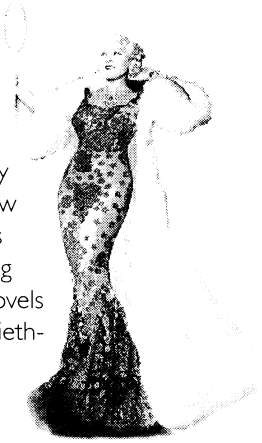
While one has to admire the skill with which Fischer traces the confluence of sexual metaphors from various discursive fields upon the literal ice that did permanent damage to Lillian Gish's arm, statements like the latter mark times at which *Cinematernity* gets a little too caught up in such reading operations. (Most egregious is Fischer's speculation, while analyzing *The Hand That Rocks the Cradle* in the context of the backlash against working mothers placing their children in day care, that the father's humming of an air from *H.M.S. Pinafore* might "evoke the fact that the first American day care facility was founded in 1838 in Boston by a Mrs. Hale, who wanted to provide a nursery for the children of sailors away at sea" [137].)

Fortunately such instances, where the display of erudition and analytical skills for their own sake doesn't provide much genuine illumination of the cinematic text, are relatively rare. Subsequent chapters make excellent use of noncinematic materials in revealing the horrific events of *Rosemary's Baby* as psychologically accurate "representations of women's *ordinary experience of parturition*" (81), in placing *White Heat's* Cody Jarrett (James Cagney) within the context of postwar fears about hysterical returning veterans and crippling Momism, and in demonstrating comedy's tendency to "throw Momma from the train," realized in the bachelor fathers' antics in *Three Men and a Cradle.* The perceptive case studies culminate in Fischer's brilliant reading of *High Heels'* homage to Douglas Sirk's *Imitation of Life* as "valorizing a postfemale world," as well as creating "a postmaternal one, envisioning a universe in which men (like Dominguez) make the best Moms, as Tootsie once made the best feminist" (175). More expansive chapters on the demented nanny thriller and on nonfiction films' representation of the mother-daughter bond round out the volume nicely.

If there is anything substantive to criticize in *Cinematernity,* it would have to be a certain disingenousness in its self-representation, stemming primarily from that third term in its subtitle, genre. The films Fischer

examines do come from a diverse range of cinematic modes, thus opening up inquiries into cinematernity beyond the usual suspects of the "maternal melodrama" or, in recent years, science fiction and the Western. Yet few of the film texts are really studied in their generic contexts. *Way Down East* may be a silent melodrama, but the chapter devoted to it analyzes it through noncinematic cultural discourses, never once considering it in relation to other silent film melodramas. Although the introduction to the horror film chapter cites some other examples of "monstrous birth" movies, it quickly moves on to a single focus on *Rosemary's Baby.* The crime film chapter, a star-image study, deals only with *White Heat* and a few other Cagney films; the only postmodern film analyzed is *High Heels.* Moreover, since when is postmodernism a *genre?* While the chapters on comedy and the thriller register a bit more as genre studies, they examine very narrowly defined subgenres, the bachelor-father comedy and the deranged nanny thriller (among which Fischer, in an impressive analytical display, manages convincingly to include *Misery.*) For an epilogue, she articulates a very limited subgenre—films about artist mothers and the children who get in the way of their art; both the fictional *High Tide* and the documentary *Finding Christa* serve as exemplary texts.

Madcaps, Screwballs, and Con Women
The Female Trickster in American Culture
LORI LANDAY



Madcaps, Screwballs, and Con Women is the first book to examine the cultural work performed by female tricksters in the "new country" of American mass consumer culture. Beginning with nineteenth-century novels and moving through twentieth-century fiction, film, radio, and television, Lori Landay looks at how popular heroines use craft and deceit to circumvent the limitations of femininity.

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Fischer herself betrays a little unease with the purported genre focus when she writes: "While [the book] makes no claims to be a study of genre, per se, it makes 'strategic' use of that notion as a fundamental *organizing principle*—as a means of structuring the text beyond the framework of a formless series of essays" (4). Well, the strategy doesn't work, because the book *does* read as a series of essays, although the notion that this renders it formless doesn't necessarily follow. As my summary above has indicated, there are strong methodological continuities, and a scholar who wishes to look at motherhood in the cinema through a straightforward series of analyses that "employ[s] strategies of close textual reading—both formally and thematically" (29) shouldn't have to pretend instead that her study is organized by "the concept of genre" that "has been feminized in its theorization—and subject to a series of maternal/familial metaphors" (10).

While *Cinematernity* may quote a few too many poems and tease out a few too many metaphors to please cinema scholars working in the vanguard of materialist cultural studies, Fischer has a wealth of provocative discoveries to communicate, and her book communicates them very clearly. For this reason, her series of close readings is set up ideally both to motivate further scholarly inquiry into the neglected area of moms in movies (for example, as compared to the very different role of motherhood in television) and to serve as a classroom text for courses in film and women's studies that wish to explore why motherhood in the cinema has so often been "a site of 'crisis'" (30).

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Hearths of Darkness

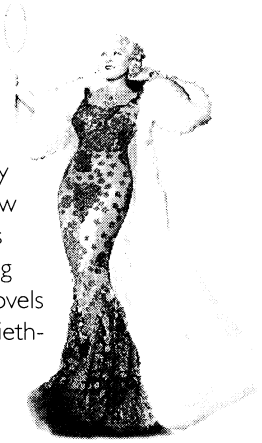
The Family in the American Horror Film

By Tony Williams. Cranbury, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996. $43.50.

Midway through Tony Williams' book *Hearths of Darkness*, the author quotes from a 1979 lecture given by "goreteur" Wes Craven on the role of the family in the modern American horror film: "The family is the best microcosm to work with. If you go beyond that you're getting away from a lot of the roots of our own primeval feelings. . . . It's not that there are violent people out there waiting to break into our own affluent circle. No. We are those people." This concept forms the core of Williams' thesis. As a microcosm of basic soci-

examines do come from a diverse range of cinematic modes, thus opening up inquiries into cinematernity beyond the usual suspects of the "maternal melodrama" or, in recent years, science fiction and the Western. Yet few of the film texts are really studied in their generic contexts. *Way Down East* may be a silent melodrama, but the chapter devoted to it analyzes it through noncinematic cultural discourses, never once considering it in relation to other silent film melodramas. Although the introduction to the horror film chapter cites some other examples of "monstrous birth" movies, it quickly moves on to a single focus on *Rosemary's Baby.* The crime film chapter, a star-image study, deals only with *White Heat* and a few other Cagney films; the only postmodern film analyzed is *High Heels.* Moreover, since when is postmodernism a *genre?* While the chapters on comedy and the thriller register a bit more as genre studies, they examine very narrowly defined subgenres, the bachelor-father comedy and the deranged nanny thriller (among which Fischer, in an impressive analytical display, manages convincingly to include *Misery.*) For an epilogue, she articulates a very limited subgenre—films about artist mothers and the children who get in the way of their art; both the fictional *High Tide* and the documentary *Finding Christa* serve as exemplary texts.

Madcaps, Screwballs, and Con Women
The Female Trickster in American Culture
LORI LANDAY



Madcaps, Screwballs, and Con Women is the first book to examine the cultural work performed by female tricksters in the "new country" of American mass consumer culture. Beginning with nineteenth-century novels and moving through twentieth-century fiction, film, radio, and television, Lori Landay looks at how popular heroines use craft and deceit to circumvent the limitations of femininity.

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Fischer herself betrays a little unease with the purported genre focus when she writes: "While [the book] makes no claims to be a study of genre, per se, it makes 'strategic' use of that notion as a fundamental *organizing principle*—as a means of structuring the text beyond the framework of a formless series of essays" (4). Well, the strategy doesn't work, because the book *does* read as a series of essays, although the notion that this renders it formless doesn't necessarily follow. As my summary above has indicated, there are strong methodological continuities, and a scholar who wishes to look at motherhood in the cinema through a straightforward series of analyses that "employ[s] strategies of close textual reading—both formally and thematically" (29) shouldn't have to pretend instead that her study is organized by "the concept of genre" that "has been feminized in its theorization—and subject to a series of maternal/familial metaphors" (10).

While *Cinematernity* may quote a few too many poems and tease out a few too many metaphors to please cinema scholars working in the vanguard of materialist cultural studies, Fischer has a wealth of provocative discoveries to communicate, and her book communicates them very clearly. For this reason, her series of close readings is set up ideally both to motivate further scholarly inquiry into the neglected area of moms in movies (for example, as compared to the very different role of motherhood in television) and to serve as a classroom text for courses in film and women's studies that wish to explore why motherhood in the cinema has so often been "a site of 'crisis'" (30).

■ Ina Rae Hark teaches at the University of South Carolina.

Hearths of Darkness

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Midway through Tony Williams' book *Hearths of Darkness*, the author quotes from a 1979 lecture given by "goreteur" Wes Craven on the role of the family in the modern American horror film: "The family is the best microcosm to work with. If you go beyond that you're getting away from a lot of the roots of our own primeval feelings. . . . It's not that there are violent people out there waiting to break into our own affluent circle. No. We are those people." This concept forms the core of Williams' thesis. As a microcosm of basic soci-

etal structures, families constantly reflect and regenerate patriarchal and hegemonic patterns that in turn produce violent or even monstrous individuals who erupt from within. His book has hit upon an exciting and enormous thematic motif of this often maligned and more often neglected genre. The role of the family in American horror movies is more than subtext. As he convincingly illustrates, families serve as a kind of binding and all-encompassing Ur-text.

From the amount of research and filmic references in the book, it is difficult to argue with such a claim. From Dr. Frankenstein's abnormal offspring to possessed preadolescents, from flesh-eating zombies to Jason Voorhees and Freddy Krueger, the family is a consistently central element of the horror film. The book chronicles the genre's most important eras and the manner in which the films reflect cultural trends and views on the family unit. Beginning with the Universal films of the 1930s, Williams moves on to discuss Val Lewton's work with RKO, George Romero's "Living Dead" trilogy, and the slasher flicks of the 80s and 90s, to name but a few examples.

While this is a valuable and impressive collection of readings of films within the genre, it is also this structure which frequently undermines the work. In an attempt to address approximately 300 films in the space of 270 pages, the book often feels more like a survey of the genre than an examination of in-depth familial elements within individual movies. Because so many films are included, the book lacks a sense of continuity. Williams rapidly jumps from film to film in his analysis, stopping only occasionally to highlight those that he deems superior examples of the genre's ability to address progressive attributes of the culture. In the end, Williams tries to cover all the bases when it might have been more prudent to focus on a few select films more emblematic of their time period and its specific cultural trends.

To give Williams credit, the foundation of his argument is solid and consistently straightforward. In his introduction, he immediately establishes a clear criterion on which he bases his readings. He combines early psychoanalytic and Marxist theory with later feminist criticism on the role of hegemony in producing repressive gender and societal roles that subconsciously cultivate aberrant behavior and individuals. From there, Williams breaks the genre down and examines it from a cultural and historical perspective to illustrate how changing attitudes toward these institutional structures have produced specific types of horror films.

This approach produces a number of illuminating insights. Using these different perspectives, Williams is able to shed new light on several neglected films and argue their usefulness based on a rebellion against rigid societal structures reinforced by traditional notions of the family. He convincingly defends such critically maligned or neglected films as Larry Cohen's "It's Alive" series by championing the ideology behind these low budget B-movies and their status as cult icons. The three movies follow the story of mutated babies born to a group of parents living amongst polluted urban environments along the West Coast. Rejected because of their hideous appearance, the babies go on a series of murderous rampages. In each film, they are hunted down by both over-eager officers of the law and agents of a large chemical corporation who are the cause of their mutation and are anxious to "destroy the evidence." The outcome of these films rests primarily on the parents' ability to accept their children's deformity and offer the babies love. The babies' violent outbursts stop once the families are made whole again. Writing about the first two movies, Williams states: "Cohen's films reveal social perversion. Contaminated by capitalist structures, the family is a manipulated unit. It produces everyday monsters . . . [but] is capable of redemption if it accepts the monstrous and moves towards new forms." It is in these analyses that the book proves most effective. Williams' strength is in championing the "monsters" of the genre, individual films that are aberrations because they defy horror's strict visual and narrative codes.

But it is also Williams' somewhat limited criteria for what constitutes worthy horror films, combined with his need to address such a large number of movies, that is frustrating about the book. "Family horror films need to develop [a] theme which shows monsters as the creation of a brutal and patriarchal system and move toward new alternatives where monsters and horror films become obsolete." In identifying good horror as films that convey a progressive message about society and the need to break with confining social patterns, Williams all too easily dismisses the more widely seen and perhaps more socially relevant films like the *Nightmare on Elm Street* or the "Friday the 13th" series. He ultimately disregards any significant messages conveyed through the majority of these movies by somewhat offhandedly categorizing them as "patriarchy's last stand" and emblematic of Reagan-era conservatism. But this criticism virtually ignores the fact that these were the very films under consistent attack by conservatives for their excessively violent aesthetic and thematic matter, and that often these movies served as valuable outlets for that decade's stifling political ideology.

Horror films, particularly those films made most recently, are consistently the distorted and deformed stepchildren hidden away in the attic of genre studies. Horror has always been an ever-present and popular form of cinematic expression. And it is always encouraging when such movies are reexamined, especially from such a promising perspective. Therefore it is somewhat

disappointing when a work taking the genre so seriously concludes with the hope that horror films will eventually "become obsolete." With the mainstream media consistently reinforcing the idea that the family unit of the 90s bears the brunt of the blame for society's ills, *Hearths of Darkness* would seem a timely and fascinating cultural examination of this phenomenon. And in many ways, it is. But in the end, it is unfortunate that the author seems to view the majority of these films as emblematic of social decay and as cultural texts lacking value. Williams' call for a more utopian version of the horror film seems ultimately misplaced and frustratingly ironic.

■ Matthew Reynolds is a student in the doctoral program in Visual and Cultural Studies at the University of Rochester.

Hibakusha Cinema

Hiroshima, Nagasaki and the Nuclear Image in Japanese Film

Edited by Mick Broderick. London and New York: Kegan Paul International, 1996. $49.95.

On the principle that the genres a culture produces and consumes can tell us much about that culture, the obverse may be equally true: that the genres *not* produced by a culture are no less revealing. In the case of Japanese cinema there is almost nothing resembling an "atomic bomb cinema" the way there is, for instance, a comparable "atom bomb literature" (*gembaku bungaku*). Why Japan would not produce an atomic bomb cinema is understandable, of course. The linked feelings of shame and victimization that discussions of the bomb inevitably bring to the surface are hardly the stuff of commercial entertainment. Yet considering the enormity of the bomb—its experience, its implications—the relative rarity of direct filmic treatments of the bomb in Japanese cinema is notable. Of all of Japan's major directors only Akira Kurosawa may be said to have dealt with the bomb in any consistent if not systematic manner. Indirect or allegorical treatments of the A-bomb, however, are prevalent in Japanese cinema. Yet only a recognition of the range of cinematic treatments of the bomb, and the relative absence of such treatments, allows a more nuanced understanding of how the Japanese have both avoided and attempted to deal with the horrendous experience of nuclear attack.

If the relative scarcity of A-bomb films in Japan is significant, perhaps even more significant is how English-language criticism has been even rarer. If Kurosawa is among the most thoroughly studied of Japan's major directors, surely his direct attempts to deal with the nuclear experience, *Record of a Living Being*, *Dreams*, *Rhapsody in August*, are among his most under-studied films. Even an undeniable cinematic masterpiece, Shohei Imamura's *Black Rain* (*Kuroi ame*) has received relatively short shrift in the critical literature. Keisuke Kinoshita's *Children of Nagasaki* (*Kono ko wo nokoshite,* 1984) remains virtually unknown in the West, as do earlier bomb-themed films like Tadashi Imai's *A Story of Pure Love* (*Junai monogatari,* 1957) and Kaneto Shindo's *Lucky Dragon No. 5* (*Daigo fukuryu*, 1958).

Happily, this situation has been alleviated by the publication of Mick Broderick's anthology, *Hibakusha Cinema*. Though not every bomb film ever made is discussed in this book, certainly the major ones are, and thus the range of Japanese cinematic responses to the bomb experience and its aftermath is amply documented. "Hibakusha" means "bomb-affected person," and the majority of films naturally describe the effects, both physical and psychological, on individuals exposed to the bomb. Yet, in a sense, all Japanese are *hibakusha* and, in terms of the bomb's implications for world peace and security, even in this post-Cold War age we are all *hibakusha.* This is therefore an important book for anyone interested not only in this under-studied topic, but anyone concerned with Japanese cinema at all and with larger issues of how cinema can deal with seemingly unrepresentable subjects and feelings. Studies of the Holocaust in cinema, for instance, have been prevalent for more than a decade now and it's time for the bomb to be brought to critical light.

Hibakusha Cinema reprints a handful of essays, including a still relevant piece by Donald Richie originally published in 1961; Susan Sontag's classic "The Imagination of Disaster": Chon Noriega's fine, award-winning essay on *Godzilla*; a section from Kyoko Hirano's must-read *Mr. Smith Goes to Tokyo*; and James Goodwin's underrated essay on Kurosawa's atomic bomb films. The other six essays in the book are entirely new and each extremely intelligent. Editor Broderick is based in Australia and he brings some newer voices to the field of Japanese film studies, including two fine essays from fellow Aussies Ben Crawford and Freda Freiberg. Interestingly, both of them concentrate on anime, the genre where the A-bomb may be most prevalent in allegorical form. Crawford begins by focusing on Shuji Terayama's short, *Emperor Tomato Ketchup*, and relates this youth-oriented film to manga and anime, filtered through sensibilities molded by the bomb experience. Freiberg focuses on *Akira*, the best-known anime in the West and sees it as part of the postmodern experience in Japan, itself shaped by the bomb experience. These are two important essays

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Perhaps the most interesting essay in the book, certainly the most detailed, is Abe Mark Nornes's look at a suppressed documentary made by Japanese filmmakers in the immediate wake of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The film, unromantically titled *The Effects of the Atomic Bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki,* is claimed by Nornes to be "the source for many of humanity's images and icons of the atomic bomb attacks . . . we can say that [the film] is the starting point for hibakusha cinema" (121). Nornes gives a production history of the film and the history of its suppression and reappearance through a wealth of Japanese and American archival sources. This kind of work is rare in English-language film criticism of the Japanese cinema and thus, aside from the importance of the film itself, marks the emergence of a new voice in Japanese film criticism. Indeed, all the essays are of a uniformly high caliber of thoughtfulness and research.

There are minor flaws here, to be sure. No essay tackles the issue of why the Japanese have avoided the bomb subject for so long, and how, too often, the few films which have been produced have portrayed the Japanese as victims without providing a historicizing of the origins of the war and Japan's culpability in it. But I am reluctant to criticize a book for what it lacks. Anthologies are notoriously hard to produce and Broderick has done a superb job in gathering together essays on a neglected topic. Still, I would say that a heavier editorial hand might have been brought to bear on Crawford's essay, which quickly loses sight of its ostensible subject and even veers away from the bomb experience a bit too far; Nornes's essay is rather unwieldy and sometimes clunky; I don't think Dorsey and Matsuoka do justice to the style and tone of Imamura's adaptation of *Black Rain*; and, most surprisingly, there is no index. But with new information and new insights positively bursting off every page, *Hibakusha Cinema* is a most valuable and crucial beginning to what, it is hoped, will be further analysis and reflection on a topic far too long and seriously ignored.

■ David Desser is Professor of Cinema Studies at the University of Illinois.

A History of Narrative Film

By David Cook. New York: W.W. Norton, 1996. $39.50. (3rd. edition)

First released in 1981, David Cook's *A History of Narrative Film* has long enjoyed a privileged status as the preeminent text on the history of the cinema. While considered by some to be unwieldy, overly ambitious, and too encyclopedic for a course text, these criticisms seem specious against this book's achievement and its varied practical applications to any number of film studies courses. This new edition presents an opportunity to reassess the usefulness of Cook's project.

Like the second edition, the third is not only revised but reconceptualized, as Cook notes changes within the film industry, new strategies in film criticism, and changes in recent world history. As in the initial version of the book, Cook combines acute critical insights with exhaustive reference material.

This new edition includes significant material on Eastern bloc cinema since the dramatic changes in the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact nations. Material on the cinema of the former USSR is recast, with extensive information on each of the 15 former republics, all of which now have their own production industries. I can think of no general text that has covered this terrain so extensively. The cinema of the Third World is given more detailed treatment, with an upgrade of material on the Mexican, Chilean, Venezualan, and Cuban cinemas, and the addition of Israeli, Iranian, and Pacific Rim cinemas. There are sections on the Nordic Cinema, the New Spanish Cinema after Franco, and the cinema of reunified Germany.

There are numerous refinements on information covered in earlier editions. Cook acknowledges the work of Tom Gunning, Charles Musser, and others in discussing the "cinema of attractions" of the medium's earliest phase. There is new material on the reception of *The Birth of a Nation*; pre-Soviet cinema newly available

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from the Goskino archives; a new section on ethnic cinema that discusses "race" films and the Yiddish cinema; and new material on studio lighting. The avant-garde also enjoys fresh appraisal. This edition makes considerable note of the American film industry in the wake of increased globalization, merger, and corporate consolidation. Cook examines noteworthy films that have appeared within (and are invarious ways resistant to) the new demands of global capital; there is extensive commentary on Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1993) and Oliver Stone's *JFK* (1991) and *Natural Born Killers* (1994).

This edition also expands its section of color plates and adds numerous black-and-white stills (there are now almost two thousand). The book is also conscious of the age of digital technology and cyberspace: along with a course guide, this edition can be purchased with a Norton Presentation Maker, a software program for both Mac and Windows that enables instructors to created multimedia presentations for classroom presentation using photographs, digital video, and laserdisc clips derived from the book.

While *A History of Narrative Film* might be criticized for being weak theoretically, we might be thankful for a film studies text that is pedagogically responsible. It is accessible to almost any undergraduate audience, avoiding the jargon-bound hypertheorization that burdens many sectors of postmodernist cinema studies. It is also clear that Cook's rethinking of his book is about much more than maintaining a viable commodity (too many books are "updated" merely to keep them on the market). *A History of Narrative Film* is evidence of a scholar seeing the continuing relationship of his work to the classroom, as well as his own need to refine and reconceptualize his understanding of his discipline.

■ Christopher Sharrett is Associate Professor of Communication at Seton Hall University. He is currently working on an anthology to be entitled *Mythologies of Violence in Postmodern Media.*

John Wayne's America

The Politics of Celebrity

By Garry Wills. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997. $26.00.

The polymath Garry Wills, best known for his studies of conservative political figures like Ronald Reagan and Richard Nixon, has turned his attention to film, producing a thoughtful, even-handed study of John Wayne as a political force in American life. *John Wayne's America: The Politics of Celebrity* contends that Wayne represented an identifiably American ideal of masculinity, "untrammeled, unspoiled, free to roam, breathing a larger air than the cramped men behind desks, the pygmy clerks and technicians." The star embodied a deep-seated American mythology, especially following the Second World War, largely because of his association with the Western. The Western's emphasis on the frontier "with freely moving men and horses" spoke to America's renewed expansionist ambitions during this period, and Western heroes like Wayne represented identifiably American traits, including "contact with nature, distrust of government, dignity achieved by performance, skepticism toward the claims of experts" (311). According to Wills, Wayne's image developed in three phases, from the callow young cowboy character he played in *The Big Trail* in 1930 to the figure of the authority he became in 1948's *Red River* to the role of a lone survivor of a past heroic time he transformed himself into in the late 1960s.

These are hardly startling conclusions, but the depth of research with which they are supported is impressive, especially considering that this is the author's first foray into the media studies field. Unlike Jane Tompkins, who made little effort to familiarize herself with a new field in her recent book on the Western, Wills has seen vast numbers of films, visited every relevant archive, read widely in the literature, and interviewed countless numbers of Wayne's friends and co-workers. The information thus gathered is often revelatory. A few examples: during the Second World War Wayne the superpatriot was more loyal to his career than to America; neither he nor his father were football heroes; he developed his prototypically masculine style largely by mimicking the manner of the legendary stuntman Yakima Canutt; and he stood six foot three, not six foot four as has always been claimed.

As thorough as Wills' research has been, however, his desire to use it to overturn previous wisdom sometimes leads him too far, as when he seeks to discredit John Ford from having made Wayne a star by giving him the leading role in *Stagecoach*. Though Ford exaggerated his contribution to the creation of the Wayne persona as he exaggerated much else about his past, *Stagecoach* was a superb vehicle for showcasing the actor's talents, and Wayne's status was decisively enhanced as a result.

Though Wills' book articulates a thesis, its organization is driven by the inclination of a popular writer to focus on narrative, chronology, and personalities rather than to advance an argument about the nature of Wayne's conservative machismo. In this spirit, Wills includes several chapters devoted to the three directors who most influenced the star's career: Raoul Walsh, who gave the actor his first major role in *The Big Trail*; Howard Hawks, who featured Wayne in four of his best-known Westerns: *Red River, Rio Bravo, El Dorado*, and *Rio*

from the Goskino archives; a new section on ethnic cinema that discusses "race" films and the Yiddish cinema; and new material on studio lighting. The avant-garde also enjoys fresh appraisal. This edition makes considerable note of the American film industry in the wake of increased globalization, merger, and corporate consolidation. Cook examines noteworthy films that have appeared within (and are invarious ways resistant to) the new demands of global capital; there is extensive commentary on Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1993) and Oliver Stone's *JFK* (1991) and *Natural Born Killers* (1994).

This edition also expands its section of color plates and adds numerous black-and-white stills (there are now almost two thousand). The book is also conscious of the age of digital technology and cyberspace: along with a course guide, this edition can be purchased with a Norton Presentation Maker, a software program for both Mac and Windows that enables instructors to created multimedia presentations for classroom presentation using photographs, digital video, and laserdisc clips derived from the book.

While *A History of Narrative Film* might be criticized for being weak theoretically, we might be thankful for a film studies text that is pedagogically responsible. It is accessible to almost any undergraduate audience, avoiding the jargon-bound hypertheorization that burdens many sectors of postmodernist cinema studies. It is also clear that Cook's rethinking of his book is about much more than maintaining a viable commodity (too many books are "updated" merely to keep them on the market). *A History of Narrative Film* is evidence of a scholar seeing the continuing relationship of his work to the classroom, as well as his own need to refine and reconceptualize his understanding of his discipline.

■ Christopher Sharrett is Associate Professor of Communication at Seton Hall University. He is currently working on an anthology to be entitled *Mythologies of Violence in Postmodern Media.*

John Wayne's America

The Politics of Celebrity

By Garry Wills. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997. $26.00.

The polymath Garry Wills, best known for his studies of conservative political figures like Ronald Reagan and Richard Nixon, has turned his attention to film, producing a thoughtful, even-handed study of John Wayne as a political force in American life. *John Wayne's America: The Politics of Celebrity* contends that Wayne represented an identifiably American ideal of masculinity, "untrammeled, unspoiled, free to roam, breathing a larger air than the cramped men behind desks, the pygmy clerks and technicians." The star embodied a deep-seated American mythology, especially following the Second World War, largely because of his association with the Western. The Western's emphasis on the frontier "with freely moving men and horses" spoke to America's renewed expansionist ambitions during this period, and Western heroes like Wayne represented identifiably American traits, including "contact with nature, distrust of government, dignity achieved by performance, skepticism toward the claims of experts" (311). According to Wills, Wayne's image developed in three phases, from the callow young cowboy character he played in *The Big Trail* in 1930 to the figure of the authority he became in 1948's *Red River* to the role of a lone survivor of a past heroic time he transformed himself into in the late 1960s.

These are hardly startling conclusions, but the depth of research with which they are supported is impressive, especially considering that this is the author's first foray into the media studies field. Unlike Jane Tompkins, who made little effort to familiarize herself with a new field in her recent book on the Western, Wills has seen vast numbers of films, visited every relevant archive, read widely in the literature, and interviewed countless numbers of Wayne's friends and co-workers. The information thus gathered is often revelatory. A few examples: during the Second World War Wayne the superpatriot was more loyal to his career than to America; neither he nor his father were football heroes; he developed his prototypically masculine style largely by mimicking the manner of the legendary stuntman Yakima Canutt; and he stood six foot three, not six foot four as has always been claimed.

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Lobo; and, of course, John Ford. Wills provides intelligent analyses of the talents of these three, along with much new information about their working methods and careful, appreciative readings of many of their films. He also offers keen insights into their failings, especially those of Ford, whose unpleasant qualities are set forth in a chapter entitled "Sadist."

Wills is extraordinarily sensitive to the details of Wayne's performances, probing the relevance of the star's physique, gestures, and famous walk with lively turns of phrase that vividly recall salient details. Touching on scores of Wayne's films, he justifies dwelling on some of the lesser-known productions as well as the canonical ones, making a convincing case, for example, about the importance of the heretofore overlooked *Big Jake* in defining the star's image. Wills is also alert to significant aspects of visual style and sound design.

The range of reference Wills employs is dazzling, though not always illuminating: What do we learn about *The Searchers* by having Ethan Edwards' anger compared to that of Achilles anger at Agamemnon for taking his slave? Still, Wills makes such comparisons between film and elite culture in an unpretentious way, avoiding the self-congratulatory air that sometimes mars similar analogies by scholars such as Stanley Cavell. Occasionally, however, the book betrays a surprising naivete about the workings of Hollywood. Wills comments, for example, that Lawrence Kasdan's *Silverado* deserved an Oscar, as if the award could be treated as something simply bestowed on the year's "best" production without regard to political considerations.

For a book that makes so much of its subject's masculinity, *John Wayne's America* has surprisingly little to say about Wayne's marriages. Indeed, the star's wives—and widely publicized divorces—are hardly mentioned. To be sure, Wills is not the first male writer to minimize the role women played in shaping his subject, but it is dismaying to note that such myopia still exists and can go unremarked by many reviewers. The lack of attention to women distorts not only Wills' account of Wayne's life but also his readings of many of the actor's most famous films. He describes *Stagecoach*, for example, as an ensemble piece rather than a star vehicle, despite the narrative's concentration on the growing romance between its two central figures, Wayne's Ringo Kid and Claire Trevor's Dallas. Calling the Ringo Kid "a minor role," Wills comments that "if we except the Kid's two walks alone with Claire Trevor, every principal character says more than the Kid does" (77). But these two walks are major scenes in the film, designed to further the romance plot. Dismissing the film's love interest with adjectives like "gooey" and "soupy," Wills, like his subject, concentrates his attention on more "manly" topics. But by ignoring the role played by a woman in shaping Wayne's image in this film, he forgoes an opportunity to examine the opposition between male and female that provides masculinity with its definition. Despite all the criticism the book mounts of Wayne and those around him, one wonders finally how much distance separates the author from his subject: like Wayne himself, Wills appears to be preoccupied with a heroic male role that would like to conceive of itself as functioning in the absence of a complementary term through which its dominance is defined.

■ Virginia Wright Wexman's 1993 book, *Creating the Couple: Love, Marriage, and Hollywood Performance* (Princeton University Press) contains a long chapter on John Wayne.

Mass Culture and Modernism in Egypt

By Walter Armbrust. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996. $54.95 cloth; $19.95 paper.

Potential readers of this book should not be misled by its title. *Mass Culture and Modernism in Egypt* seems to suggest an austere, sociological study of this topic, quite different from the lively and innovative discussion, particularly of Egyptian cinema, which the book actually offers. Armbrust's analysis of the two key concepts in his title emerges from a semi-autobiographical, ethnographic account of everyday cultural consumption in Egypt in the late 1980s and 1990s. The author is a declared fan of Egyptian cinema as well as an Arabic-speaking scholar. The methodology adopted is based upon the consumption, in Egypt and often alongside his (non-academic) Egyptian informants, of cultural artifacts which have been recommended to him as particularly important, controversial, or resonant. Current favourites are considered, as well as fondly remembered older films and associated songs and sound tracks still available on video or on audio cassette. From this basis, significant trends, historical changes in production and consumption, and taste hierarchies are outlined. Cinema is privileged in this discussion; perhaps unduly, given that its relative importance in relation to other media is never explored. However, even if the weighting may be uneven as far as the broader topic of mass culture is concerned, it is, from a film studies perspective, a welcome imbalance.

Armbrust's immersion in and wide knowledge of Egyptian mass culture enables him not only to cross-reference extensively within Egyptian film history but also to locate the specific films discussed within wider intertextual networks. These include linguistic practices

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(i.e., social and cultural connotations carried by characters' uses of different types of Arabic and foreign languages), dress codes, popular music, television serials, and of course star images which proliferate far beyond the boundaries of individual film texts (e.g., crossover music/film and theater/film performers such as the legendary singer Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab and, more recently, the extraordinarily popular actor/comedian Adil Imam). Since most readers' familiarity with this material cannot be assumed, the narratives of the films discussed are always helpfully summarized prior to more detailed discussion.

In its diligent yet enthusiastic construction of a "thick description" of Egyptian popular cinema, *Mass Culture and Modernism in Egypt* represents something of a breakthrough in English-language studies of what has remained, outside of its country of origin, a largely unknown area of film history. The few previous books on Egyptian cinema, such as Muhammad Khan's useful little *The Cinema in Egypt* (1969), have generally restricted themselves to discussions of the structure of the industry and surveys of critically acclaimed films. What is both novel and enjoyable in Armbrust's work is that his approach is in certain respects closer to Jackie Stacey's or Henry Jenkins' concern with audiences' appropriations and transformations of cultural resources drawn from the cinema. He pays careful attention, for example, to the significance of lines of dialogue or song lyrics which pass into everyday parlance, or to the adoption, by some urban male youth, of the haircut popularised by the hero of the boxing film *Crabs* (Khayri Bishara, 1990).

Armbrust's methodological stance in *Mass Culture and Modernism in Egypt* is, on the whole, appropriately measured. He acknowledges his own liminality and attempts, as far as possible, to follow the lead of his Egyptian informants in terms of the selection of material as well as the interpretation of its significance to their understandings of themselves, their aspirations, and social situations. He avoids instant generalizations in order to underline important differences between the tastes of older and younger consumers, and he pinpoints conflicts, especially within the latter group, over the value of particular artifacts. For the first time in English, the role that Egypt's vibrant popular culture has always played within struggles to define Egyptian identity and a distinctively Egyptian modernity is brought vividly to light.

Armbrust's main thesis is that an older (pre-1970s) notion of Egyptian modernity constituted the central ideology underlying both relatively light-hearted films (for example, *The White Rose* [Muhammad Karim, 1933], a star vehicle for singer Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab) *and* more serious, critically acclaimed realist films (such as *Resolution* [Kamal Salim, 1939]). This Egyptian modernity was understood in general terms as a delicate balance between selected elements of an indigenously Egyptian heritage (*turath*) and certain Western cultural and technological influences. The social cement holding this together was an (imagined) alliance between the enlightened, reformist Egyptian middle class and *ibn al-balad* (a complex appellation, broadly designating the ordinary, uneducated, but basically decent "common man" located in the poorer urban quarters). It is a version of modernity which, in the wake of the devastating 1967 defeat in the war against Israel and Sadat's socially divisive 1970s "Open Door" free market policies, is seriously questioned or undermined by many more recent productions, and by some of the younger generation's disillusioned, cynical, or ruefully nostalgic attitudes toward the older films. *Ragab on a Hot Tin Roof* (Ahmad Fuad, 1979), featuring superstar Adel Imam, is analyzed in some detail as a typical and very popular testament to the exhaustion of the older version of Egyptian modernity. The film's peasant hero is disorientated and exploited within a deceptive, corrupt, and thoroughly commodified urban landscape which offers no potential for social integration.

Mass Culture and Modernism in Egypt could play into film and cultural studies debates about whether North American and Western European conceptualizations of postmodernity can adequately explain other cultural contexts, or whether the concepts themselves need to be revised or abandoned when these other contexts are taken into consideration. If Armbrust is correct in arguing that there is a tendency which can be described as "post" an earlier notion of modernity within contemporary Egyptian popular cinema and culture, then is this development unconnected with, differentially related to, or simply a pale imitation of parallel changes within Hollywood? One (and only one) of the distinctive elements articulated within contemporary Egyptian popular cinema's structure of feeling seems to be an implicit recognition that the promises of an earlier modernizing ideology have broken down, perhaps irretrievably. Insofar as their reflection of this dissolution of old certainties is diffuse rather than focused, and more concerned with feeling than with intellection, popular Egyptian films differ from the condensed, multi-layered national allegories, with their invitation to critical reflection, which Fredric Jameson identifies in the limited (and possibly non-typical) sample of Third World texts discussed in his "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism." At the same time, contemporary Egyptian cinema does not indulge in quite the same kind of play with surface intensity, spectacle, and pastiche which Jameson posits as the dominant characteristic of much high-consumerist, late-capitalist Hollywood cinema.[1] Of course, only a more systematic comparative investigation could confirm or deny these speculations, and it would certainly need to nuance them. Nevertheless, this

is an intriguing working hypothesis which potentially adds another dimension to the debate on Third World culture(s), postmodernity, and national allegory inaugurated by Jameson, contested by Aijaz Ahmad, and carried through into cinema studies by writers such as Ella Shohat and Robert Stam.

Apart from a brief ten pages of general introduction and a suggestive footnote (222, n.7), Armbrust's work here largely eschews the kind of abstract theorizing I have tentatively linked it to in the preceding paragraph. Its strength derives from its richly textured, thoughtful observations of the quotidian cultural experiences of specific, named individuals whose responses and attitudes are related but not reduced to their position within social structures and sociological categories. One drawback is that on some occasions this generally enabling approach lapses into mere anecdote, and at times the emphasis upon the author's immediate circle of informants is restrictive. For example, Egyptians allied with or sympathetic to Islamic social and political movements tend to be marginalized. Such figures hover as shadowy presences around the margins of Armbrust's narrative, but their perhaps unavoidable absence does omit an important and powerful spectrum of taste and opinion from the discussion. Equally, the majority of the informants are male, and the ramifications of issues such as womens' consumption of films within the home and on television and video tend to be neglected. Armbrust ignores issues of gender within Egyptian modernity, and this also leads to partial or weak readings of particular films. A case in point is the discussion of *My Father Is up the Tree* (Husayn Kamal, 1969). The casting in this film of the important female star Nadiya Lutfi, and her control of the gaze during key moments within the narrative, are not mentioned at all. Although Lutfi's gaze is heavily marked as dangerous and deviant, and she is punished within the narrative at the end of the film when the hero (the singer Abd al-Halim Hafiz) abandons her for the bland and colorless "good" girl, she is nevertheless available to spectators as a potential point of empathy and as an ambivalent icon of modern, liberated sexuality.

The conceptual and methodological limit points traceable within *Mass Culture and Modernism in Egypt* do not detract from the overall importance of the questions which the book opens up and of the approach it takes to them. Armbrust's work is of considerable relevance to film and cultural studies, and has much to contribute to debates about Third World cinemas, and about cinema, modernity, and postmodernity more generally. Discussion of African and Arab cinemas tends to revolve around the fairly small corpus of critically validated films already familiar to Western scholars, and to berate the restricted distribution of this canon within these Third World spaces. However, the current dispositions and tastes of audiences are rarely studied in detail. What happens to be popular at the moment should not, of course, be exalted over films which could and should be more widely distributed, but by the same token nobody can deny that a more sophisticated understanding of audiences is absolutely essential to furthering the debate. *Mass Culture and Modernism in Egypt* provides an engaging example of how this kind of work could be carried forward.

■ Martin Stollery is Lecturer in Film Studies at Southampton Institute in England.

1. As its final footnote indicates, Jameson's much debated "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (Fall 1986), was conceived as a companion piece analyzing the "other side" of the cultural condition diagnosed in his "Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* 146 (July/August (1984).

Max Ophuls in the Hollywood Studios

By Lutz Bacher. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1996. $70.00.

For most of its history, the auteur "theory" has thrived without the inconvenience of research into the Hollywood studio context. Such scholarship (exemplified by the work of Rick Jewell and Thomas Schatz) provides production histories that support the hypothesis that a pantheon director's work either transcends studio strictures or succumbs to them.

Lutz Bacher's astonishing study of Max Ophuls' 1941–1949 sojourn in Hollywood is a welcome addition to such scholarship. (Full disclosure: I read this volume informally in manuscript stage and offered some suggestions.) This book describes, in compellingly vivid detail, what Bacher calls "the process of a European director's adaptation to the Hollywood mode of production and the demands for accommodating classical Hollywood stylistic norms" (2).

It is not a pretty sight. Ophuls had a rough time of it in Hollywood during the 1940s, and one might argue no emigré director of his calibre fared worse. After various successes in 1930s Europe, he spent 1941 to 1944 learning English and seeing hopes of new projects raised only to be dashed. His first substantial assignment was writing and directing *Vendetta* for Preston Sturges and Howard Hughes, and after slaving for months on its script, he experienced the subtle but exquisite humiliation of watching helplessly as the protean Sturges slowly took the directorial reins out of Ophuls' hands on the set.

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There followed in rapid succession the 1946 swashbuckler *The Exile* with Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., the legendary *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, the deeply troubled *Caught* (both 1948), and the fascinating *The Reckless Moment* (1949), none of them box-office successes. Though Ophuls' films are highly valued today, he worked in Hollywood at the worst possible time (facing theater divorcement, Communist witch hunts, and declining audiences). Only an ambitious runaway project with Greta Garbo got Ophuls back to France, where *La Ronde* (1951), *Le Plaisir* (1952), and *The Earrings of Madame de . . .* (1953) brought him the kind of working conditions and acclaim he so clearly deserved.

As a whole, Bacher's book is unique, a landmark event in Hollywood scholarship. Most production histories are content to compare final script drafts with the finished film, with perhaps a nod to the original source, Breen Office concerns, and studio correspondance. This clarifies very effectively the precise choices the writers, director, and actors have made (or have been compelled to make) for the final film and the meanings they intended by such choices.

By contrast, Bacher examines all the usual materials, *plus* personal correspondence, studio production meetings, daily production reports, and script supervisors' notes. He has also spoken with surviving Ophuls collaborators (stars, screenwriters, executives, studio managers, editors, first assistant directors, production secretaries) since the late 1970s onward. His determination to specify Ophuls' working conditions is unprecedented, and the chronology he uncovers testifies to his patient sorting out of innumerable sources. (Bacher's introduction, where he presents his methodology, has among its many virtues its status as a primer for anyone planning archival research of this kind. Subsequent pages even provide a step-by-step explanation of how to read a daily production report.) The volume is illustrated with plentiful production shots of equipment, sets, and actors (including some new photos of Ophuls on the set).

All these materials enable Bacher to determine the interplay of various forces and perspectives as a film was being made; to construct a virtual day-to-day picture of the excruciating labor that informed life on an Ophuls set (or any other); and to offer a month-to-month account of how a project was planned, modified, and executed from preproduction through postproduction. Vignettes of Ophuls' technical associates—cinematographer Franz Planer, production designer Howard Bay—round out our sense of the artistic traditions informing an Ophuls film, while Bacher's discussion of Hollywood's changing market situates Ophuls' artistic choices and his debates with studio executives.

Those debates revolved primarily around Ophuls' stylistic signature—what Bacher calls the "rhythmic long take"—which conflicted with classic era studio managers' investment in production efficiency and in Hollywood's invisible style. This was a dynamic camera movement (on cranes and dollies) that maintained constant subject-camera distance. Ophuls employed it to create editing rhythms and to heighten introductions to new settings, characters, or moods. It also served as a way of avoiding the "jolt" of a cut, which Ophuls felt deeply (3-5), though co-workers sometimes described Ophuls' long takes as a stylistic flourish, a way of showing off (90). One of Bacher's most surprising discoveries is that, for all the time-consuming rehearsals Ophuls' long takes required, when completed they could catapult the director a day or so ahead of schedule. By contrast, shot/reverse shot scenes slowed him down considerably. "Everyone *was* impressed with his long takes," editor Robert Parrish tells Bacher. "There was a bit of this in there, too—that it's lunch and we don't have a shot and then at three o'clock there would be the whole day's work done." (228).

Moreover, the long take in Ophuls' hands was not by itself a point of contention, but became problematic in tandem with his tendency to neglect "coverage" (shots of the same action from different angles), which disturbed executives reviewing the rushes. Parrish compares Ophuls to John Ford, in that the design of Ophuls' shots meant that there was one best way to cut the scene together. In particular, Ophuls avoided what he described to James Mason as the "rabbit shot"—the close-up of the actor's face in the midst of some dramatic action. Yet another revelation places Ophuls as the Ozu of Hollywood, given to disregarding consistent screen direction, either because it just didn't matter or, in Douglas Fairbanks, Jr.'s words, "He thought it fun to cause momentary confusion" (103).

Perhaps this was payback for the confusing regimes Ophuls worked under in Hollywood. After the *Vendetta* fiasco, Ophuls found a comparatively genial production management at Universal-International during the making of *The Exile*, an homage to the star's legendary father. On *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, Ophuls' work was never without studio interference, which peaked in postproduction. Time and again, Universal-International executives insisted that close-ups punctuate Ophuls' long takes—of young Lisa's (Joan Fontaine) face as she first explores of Stefan's (Louis Jourdan) apartment, for example, or of Stefan playing piano while young Lisa listens as she swings outside. These interventions destroyed what screenwriter Howard Koch called the "spell" of the film and countered Ophuls own rationale for his use of the long take: "The camera captured that story better in traveling by than it would have in standing still, because the whole story was told in passing, thoughts of the past that past [sic] one by" (193–197). (Ophuls was free, however, to plan the celebrated shot of Lisa climbing to Stefan's apartment from the same angle and with the same

camera movement that accompanied an earlier scene where she witnessed his return with another woman; this, Bacher informs us, was something Ophuls thought up on the set [148–151].) The many disputes surrounding the film only enhanced Ophuls' reputation as "difficult" and made future employment a perennial concern.

Having won the unstinting admiration of young directors in Hollywood from Nicholas Ray to Joseph Losey, and the friendship of Montgomery Clift, Ophuls moved on to *Caught*, which could have represented a major turning point in Ophuls' American sojourn. At the semi-independent Enterprise Productions, executive inexperience and preoccupation with low finances, along with James Mason's solid backing, gave Ophuls greater authority to shoot and edit than on his two previous films (228). Yet there were still the struggles with Production Code demands for a suitable ending that frees Leonora (Barbara Bel Geddes) from the tyrannical millionaire Smith Ohlrig (Robert Ryan) and their unborn child to marry Dr. Quinada (James Mason), and there were production restrictions that prevented Ophuls from giving the film the "air" (atmosphere), as he called, it the subject demanded.

On *The Reckless Moment*, negotiating between producer Walter Wanger's desire to make an American *Mrs. Miniver* or *Brief Encounter* and Columbia's penny-pinching antics, Ophuls and the screenwriters produced a crucial film in the development of Hollywood's famously subversive 1950s family melodramas. Here comments from actors, screenwriters, and editors, as well as the extensive documentation in the Walter Wanger papers, testify to Ophuls' inventiveness—his thinking up, for example, the sleazy Ted Darby's (Shepperd Strudwick) business of straightening his tie while a cigarette dangles from his lips en route to meeting outraged mother Lucia Harper (Joan Bennett) at his seedy midtown hotel. Bacher also documents the challenge which Ophuls' long-take, one-shot scene approach presented to cinematographer Burnett Guffey and the cast, who were completely unused to it. By now, Ophuls knew enough to overcome their hesitation by thoroughly charming his crew. And while the studio continually insisted on rabbit shots and extensive retakes to punch up key dialogue scenes, Ophuls, with Wanger's backing, held the line.

None of these films scored dramatically at the box office, and Bacher rounds out his volume with a sketch of Ophuls' involvement in the ill-fated *Duchesse of Langeais* Garbo project, and with some telling observations about Ophuls' European career—that he was in fact perennially hoping to return to Hollywood, even while working successfully in France. One of his most promising prospects was a film about Degas and his era; but producer John Houseman instead went on to sponsor Vincente Minnelli's van Gogh biopic *Lust for Life* (1956).

My only quibble with this superlative volume concerns the Bacher's suggestion that knowledge of a film's production history can correct "misreadings" of particular shots or scenes. He tells us that a soft-focus close-up of Stefan at the opera in *Letter* was taken against a grey background in postproduction (because the opera set had already been struck) and was shot contrary to Ophuls' plan (he wished the audience to sense Stefan's presence from offscreen); yet this does not invalidate Tania Modleski's claim that the shot "feminize[s]" Stefan and "destabilize[s]" his masculinity, offering momentary pleasures for the female viewer (17-18). After the rise of cultural studies and reception studies, it seems more reasonable to say that knowledge of production history enriches our appreciation of a film, but does not alter the status of an interpretation of possible meanings in the finished film.

In fact, *Max Ophuls in the Hollywood Studios* can be enjoyed with concurrent viewings of the films themselves and a handy sample of the critical commentary (such as Susan White's *The Cinema of Max Ophuls)* which Bacher refers to from time to time. But however you approach it, this book is as exhilarating as a "you are there" documentary, and as definitive a work as they come, establishing a new standard for production history. Anyone interested in auteurism, in studio history, in the labor of the Hollywood set or of the postproduction suite, or just in Ophuls himself—that is to say just about everyone who cares about film—will find it a revelation.

■ Matthew Bernstein is the author of *Walter Wanger, Hollywood Independent* and co-editor, with Gaylyn Studlar, of *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film.*

Mexican Cinema/Mexican Woman, 1940–1950

By Joanne Hershfield. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1996. $39.95 cloth; $16.95 paper.

Until recently the study of Latin-American cinema has been sparsely represented in English–language book length publications. Happily, the 1990s have brought an increasing number of books addressing Latin-American film. Among these are general historical studies such as John King's *Magical Reels: A History of Latin American Cinema* and Zuzana Pick's *The New Latin American Cinema: A Continental Project*; discrete studies of national and regional cinemas, such as Charles Ramirez Berg's *Cinema of Solitude: A Critical Study of Mexican Film, 1967-1983*, the long–anticipated

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expanded edition of Randal Johnson and Robert Stam's anthology *Brazilian Cinema*, and *Ex–Iles: Essays on Caribbean Cinema*, edited by Mbye Chan; and anthologies such as *The Ethnic Eye: Latino Media Arts*, and *Mediating Two Worlds: Cinematic Encounters in the Americas*. Most of these larger volumes were written or edited by senior scholars in the field, scholars who broke ground for Latin-American and Latino film studies with a myriad of journal publications, special editions of journals, conferences, university courses, and exhibitions. The importance of these books lies in their coverage of broad areas, geographically, theoretically, and historically. Along with certain publications from the 1980s, these books demonstrate the richness of the field, the wealth of the scholarship, and the great potential for more work in this area.

A second generation of Latin-American film scholars has begun to follow its mentors and colleagues with an impressive array of dissertations, journal articles, and conference presentations. Building on earlier historical and critical work, these volumes often address theoretical issues of concern to the larger film studies community. Joanne Hershfield's *Mexican Cinema/Mexican Woman, 1940–1950* falls into this category of Latin-American film scholarship. The volume's narrow focus on six Mexican films, all produced in the 1940s, is intended to illuminate how the cinematic figure of woman functioned in Mexico to mediate narrative and social debates (1). Hershfield's project is particularly timely in that it addresses gendered identity and national cinema, topics which currently enjoy the interest of much of the scholarly film community. As such, her contributions are not limited to Latin-American film studies, but also seek a dialogue with other studies of national cinema, of woman and femininity, and of historiography (134-135). Yet the strengths of *Mexican Cinema/Mexican Woman*, the restricted focus, the connection of film to national myth and foundational fiction, and the author's excessive reliance on identity and feminist theory, also prove to be the book's greatest weaknesses.

The six films Hershfield examines were produced during the era of Mexico's Golden Age cinema (roughly 1935 through the 1950s). *Mexican Cinema/Mexican Woman* analyzes six women–centered melodramas from the 1940s—*María Candelaria* (Emilio Fernández, 1943), *Rio Escondido* (Emilio Fernández, 1947), *Distinto Amanecer (*Julio Bracho, 1943), *Salón México* (Emilio Fernández, 1948), *Doña Barbara* (Fernando de Fuentes, 1943), and *Susana* (Luis Buñuel, 1950). Hershfield proposes, through these films, to show "how woman, as an already existing sign of ambiguity in Mexican culture (virgin/whore, mother/femme fatale, nurturer/destroyer), served as a ready–made symbol of the instability of social and sexual relations in Mexico in the 1940s" (3). This is an ambitious goal for such a slender volume and one which causes the author to cram into small spaces a lot of theory about film, feminism, politics, and identity. Unfortunately, many theoretical discussions in *Mexican Cinema/Mexican Woman* assume that the reader brings the same level of knowledge to the book. For the uninitiated, Hershfield's introduction of theory and scholarship can, at times, be baffling and confusing. For those well versed in the work she utilizes, Hershfield's profuse citations provoke questions of where the author's own voice is, what her own thoughts on the subject are.

Generally, Hershfield offers functional analyses of the six films. Two big questions lingered, however, for this reader. The first has to do with the choice of three films by one director, Emilio "el Indio" Fernández, for her study. Fernández was a prolific filmmaker whose contributions to the Mexican Golden Age cinema are undisputed. However, Hershfield needs to explain Fernández's role within the Mexican film industry, the national consciousness, and foreigners' understanding of Mexican film. Situating the filmmaker within the context of the period she studies would strengthen her argument and the structure of her project.

The second lingering question provokes greater confusion. Hershfield claims that Mexican Golden Age cinema "was distinctly Mexican, telling Mexican stories and narrativizing Mexican social problems" (7). Given this definition, Fernando de Fuentes' screen version of *Doña Barbara* and Luis Buñuel's *Susana* (both discussed in Chapter 5) are complex choices, not only for their narratives, but for the very question Hershfield approaches through them—the archetype of *la devoradora* (the devourer), as a distinctly Mexican screen character. De Fuentes' *Doña Barbara* is adapted from the Romulo Gallegos novel of the same title. Gallegos, as both a novelist and president of Venezuela, provided his homeland with some of the myths upon which modern national identity has been built. Among these, none is more important than *Doña Barbara*. While de Fuentes' screen version certainly provides fertile ground for the study of the *mala mujer*, the Mexican femme fatale, its origins as a Venezuelan foundational fiction problematize the nationality of this story. Hershfield acknowledges that by setting *Doña Barbara* "in a place and time far from Mexico, the narrative attempts to displace issues of sexuality, class conflicts, and gender relations from Mexican history" (109). However, her reading of the film does not discuss how this displacement might be read as non–Mexican and, thus, as different from Mexican ideals of socially defined women's roles. How, in other words, does this deliberate distanciation function within a *Mexican* film whose goal, Hershfield argues, "is to reinstate the father's potency and power by destroying the efficacy *of la devoradora*" (111)?

In the same chapter, Hershfield discusses Buñuel's *Susana*, arguing effectively that the director "found the Mexican film melodrama to be a fertile domain in which to experiment with and subvert aesthetics and ideology" (121). Hershfield describes the opening sequence of this film:

> Noticing a shadow in the shape of a cross on the dirt floor of her cell, Susana kneels in front of it and begs the "God of prisoners" to set her free. When a spider, one of Buñuel's recurrent motifs, creeps across the shadow, Susana jumps to the window and rattles the bars. To her surprise, the bars break loose and she climbs out into the storm (116).

This scene and the film's final image of a family reunited with a sunset burning in the background, are, according to Hershfield, similar to the "absurd moments" which have "earned classical Mexican cinema a reputation for being excessively melodramatic (excessive in this case being a disparaging label)" (116). She continues, "in Buñuel's Mexican films, they function as a parodic critique of melodrama itself" (116). Hershfield's analysis of *Susana* supports these assertions cogently.

However, her discussion of Buñuel's nationality and of the complexity of calling his films made in Mexico "Mexican films" suffers the same problems as the discussion of *Doña Barbara*. As Marsha Kinder notes in *Blood Cinema*, Buñuel is claimed by three nations—Spain, Mexico, and France. Further, some historians of Spanish and Mexican film have displayed him as the example of those nation's films.[1] Hershfield does note the problematic of Buñuel's nationality and the subversion and inversion of gender and class in his Mexican films. Yet she launches into her textual analysis without examining how Buñuel's position as a political exile in an adopted homeland might have contributed to the parody she unpacks. Her discussion of Buñuel's attachment to Surrealism and of the impact of Surrealism in Mexico (122) does not smoothly connect to her analysis of parody in *Susana*. In this instance, remaining tightly focused on the text in question leaves many questions whose answers could only have deepened Hershfield's inquiry into the screen role of Mexican women and rebuilding national identity.

Mexican Cinema/Mexican Woman opens and closes with references to Frida Kahlo, the great Mexican painter who explored time and again her own dichotomous relation to her homeland. Recently elevated to a position of esteem among art and film cognoscenti in the United States, Kahlo is for many the only embodiment of what Hershfield calls the Mexican woman's "divided 'inner' nature" (3). Kahlo's divided subjectivity and her current position as a nearly sacred symbol of the fractured subjectivity of Mexican women of a certain class and education level certainly provide an elegant metaphor for the problems Hershfield seeks to unravel. But, while Kahlo's paintings often invoked the contrast of the Euro–Mexican and the Indian Mexican, we must remember that even more often her work was private, interiorized, personal, and self–reflective. As Laura Mulvey notes, "Frida Kahlo's paintings emerge directly out of her life—her physical suffering and her emotional suffering."[2]

Perhaps the key to Hershfield's theoretical dilemma lies within Mulvey's comment—for it is ultimately necessary to acknowledge that the screen women Hershfield examines are not real people with the emotional and physical concerns that haunted Kahlo or any other Mexican woman. They are constructions, representations, and inversions of woman, cinematic images whose nature cannot be completely divorced from the screen. These are women of cinema and women of Mexico—Hershfield would do well to expand her inquiry into the distance as well as the connection between the two.

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The New Censors

Movies and the Culture Wars

By Charles Lyons. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1997. $59.95 cloth; $17.95 paper.

The study of Hollywood movie censorship has undergone dramatic changes in the past ten years with the recent availability of the MPPDA's Production Code Administration files and with the introduction of new models of cultural politics for examining local censorship. But very little indeed has been written about film regulation after 1968, when Jack Valenti introduced the rating system, and it is precisely that niche that Charles Lyons' informative study fills. Lyons argues persuasively that since the late 1960s, groups on both the left and right have protested "aggressively" against specific films, and that such protests, a manifestation of the "culture wars," "demonstrate how direct-action campaigns have come to overshadow the only remaining formal means of movie regulation, the rating system" (2).

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dissertation. The book is predominantly a highly readable description of various cultural skirmishes, a series of case studies involving different constituencies and actions taken against specific movies. From the left, there are the protests against woman-bashing (in Brian DePalma's *Dressed to Kill* [1980]), or ethnic or sexual orientation slurs (as in *Year of the Dragon* [1985] and *Basic Instinct* [1991]); from the right, we learn of the Reagan adminstration's actions against the Canadian documentary *If You Love This Planet* (1982) or evangelicals' objections to religious "blasphemy" in *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988).

In each chapter, Lyons sketches in the background of the offended community and/or its relationship to Hollywood, traces the generic lineage of the film under protest, mentions some prior disputes, and then devotes about ten to twelve pages to the actual controversy. Just a few analytical insights are thrown in for good measure—one of them, interestingly enough, is that violence is not at issue in any of these debates. Politicians may castigate Hollywood generally on these grounds, but it is rare for a single film to earn condemnation (as Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers* did from Bob Dole and others in 1994).

The case of *If You Love This Planet* is in many ways the most surprising one in the book; the Reagan Justice Department labeled as "political propaganda" this 20-minute Canadian documentary on the impact of nuclear war and U.S. nuclear policies, and insisted that "political propaganda" was a "neutral" term of description. Lyons reports, however, that the government was legally empowered to label the film, thanks to some obscure Congressional Acts of the 1930s. This action was not as obvious an act of censorship as its critics implied—the forewarning inserted on prints of the film did not inhibit screenings and, in fact, gave it greater exposure (and eventually *If . . .* earned an Academy Award). Lyons characterizes the labeling as "more an instance of ideological intimidation than of censorship" (183). Already we can appreciate the difficulty of defining censorship in such circumstances.

Lyons places the objections to *Dressed to Kill* in the context of various first amendment legal victories and feminist protests against pornography of the late 1970s and implies that the disputes surrounding DePalma's film were sparked as much by the film's critical acclaim and box-office success as by its textual politics. Protesters argued that the sexual fantasies of the Angie Dickinson and Nancy Allen characters suggested that women crave violence against their bodies; at the same time, those objecting to the film had to defend their actions by stressing that they did not seek to suppress the film, but to give the audience their perspective on it. Though Lyons does not make this point, this position is uncomfortably close to that of Reagan's Justice Department regarding *If You Love This Planet.*

In fact, this is a major motif of Lyons' study: the game of protest is played the same way from both sides of the political spectrum—those speaking up ultimately affirm that they wish to preserve free speech, that they do not wish to censor a film (even if they actually do); but they want potential filmgoers to hear alternative views of the movie, hence acknowledging (on some level) that films can mean different things to different viewers. Yet those who articulate these claims know well that one can't watch a film in precisely the same way if one encounters intense criticism of it on the way to the theater.

Regarding *In the Year of the Dragon*, Lyons speculates that by the 1980s, Hollywood thought it had little to fear from offending Asian Americans. Certainly, the small contretemps over *The Fiendish Plot of Fu Manchu* (1980) and *Charlie Chan and the Curse of the Dragon Queen* (1981) could not have prepared any studio for the thorough organization of Asian-American groups by the time Michael Cimino's film began shooting in 1984; besides protesting on location in Chinatown, 36 groups across the country joined together after an August 1985 preview confirmed that the film depicted all its "major" Asian-American characters as "murderous gangsters." Flooding the media with leaflets and speakers, organizing a national day of protest, and bringing a class action suit against MGM/UA, all compelled the studio to add expensive disclaimers to prints of the film already in circulation. Although the larger issues of racism could not be addressed by such actions, Lyons argues that "Asian Americans had decided that, however much they desired to censor demeaning stereotypes, their gradual empowerment depended on upon structuring demands in noncensorious ways" (106).

Basic Instinct raised the shadow of Hollywood's longstanding insensitivity to gay and lesbians. When production executives rejected out of hand the admittedly quixotic casting and scripting changes demanded by members of ACT UP, Queer Nation, and the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (such as to change the Michael Douglas hero to a Kathleen Turner heroine), these groups, like others described in the book, answered charges of censorship with pleas for balanced portrayals of gays and lesbians, and emphasized their attempt to make viewers think critically. Most imaginatively of all, they gave away the ending so viewers could watch the film more critically. Contrasting GLAAD's emphasis on raising consciousness through commentary in the media with Queer Nation's demonstrations and arrests, Lyons notes that the results of the various protests were mixed, depending on the criteria one used: the filmmakers ignored the protesters' demands, and *Basic Instinct* still had a solid box-office opening weekend, but the media

(from CNN to various newspapers) covered the debate vigorously, publicizing Hollywood's ignoble tradition of debasing gay and lesbian characters.

The widespread religious protest against Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ* takes on a fresh perspective when Lyons reminds us of the Production Code's origins and the 1979 formation of Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority, and of the increase in Christian evangelism at the advent of the Reagan era. This was by far the largest campaign recounted in *The New Censors*, from a 25,000-person protest at Universal Studios to the millions contacted by virtue of national organization. Universal, while not adding a disclaimer to the film, did schedule a limited premiere one month ahead of the original schedule. Lyons states on the one hand that this was a shrewd move to take advantage of the protest publicity; yet he subsequently sees the date change (and the decision by several theater chains not to book the film) as showing the power of the religous right, which is far superior to that of the left. Interestingly enough, when the film opened, the Christian vandalism and extremism made the arrested ACT UP activists look like Emily Post graduates.

As one progresses through the book, the protests become more elaborate, the the charges of censorship become more frequent, and the protesting groups take greater care to position themselves apart from censorship and in favor of public education. We come to see that where the self-regulation of Hollywood's studio system provided very clear demarcations of the effects of censorship, our current protest era of protest makes assessing results quite difficult. Ex-censor Murray Schumach was right: having no movie censorship rules would create as many problems as having them; but I find myself agreeing with Lyons' opening position: "Although some antimovie actions by groups or institutions may produce censorious results, in a democracy it is far more healthy to risk such an outcome than in any way to limit groups' right to 'peaceably gather' and protest" (1). Lyons' determination in the conclusion to locate "winners and losers" threatens to, but does not succeed at, undoing our sense of the complex social dynamics documented in the actual case studies. All in all, this is an admirable and informative book. Lyons has rounded out each chapter with phone-call interviews with major participants in the various protests, getting their perspectives after the passage of time; this touch enlivens the case histories, which are largely drawn from press accounts and the odd organizational pamphlet. I should note that Lyons is much stronger on contemporary Hollywood than on its history, and any number of factual errors crop up: it's Howard Hughes who directed 1943's *The Outlaw,* not *Home Alone*'s John; Geoffrey Shurlock's first name is always mispelled; and the NAACP was not created in response to *The Birth of Nation* (1915), but predated it by several years and its protest against the film was anything but a "victory."

These details aside, *The New Censors* is an extremely valuable starting point for considering how the culture wars relate to the movies, and what forms film regulation has taken since the 1960s. Of the contemporary scene, Lyons notes that "Controversies over movies have finally become inseparable from the larger debates over culture, dynamic forums in which both sides of the cultural divide can complain, and both, at least temporarily, can assure themselves that their values represent the more correct vision for America" (186). One thinks, for example, of the Southern Baptist Convention's call in summer 1997 to boycott Disney in all its manifestations (how apt that Lyons is working for Disney now!); here the protest against an entertainment conglomerate differs sharply from the film-focused disputes that Lyons discusses. Time will tell whether the Baptist Convention will be seen as inaugurating a highly effective new protest strategy or as a quixotic tilting at an undoubtedly powerful mouse-eared hydra.

■ Matthew Bernstein recently co-edited (with Gaylyn Studlar) *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film* (1997).

Novel to Film

An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation

By Brian McFarlane. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996. $70.00 cloth; $19.95 paper.

In this interesting volume, Brian McFarlane examines the process by which novels are transformed into filmic adaptations of the source texts, using the 1926 version of *The Scarlet Letter*, *Random Harvest* (1942), *Great Expectations* (1946), *Daisy Miller* (1974), and Martin Scorsese's remake of *Cape Fear* (1991) as primary examples. McFarlane notes how in many cases the novel's original intent has been altered, and additional material added, in order to satisfy the requirements of the either the studios or the filmmakers involved. In *The Scarlet Letter*, the theme of adultery had to be considerably toned down before it could pass the censor; scenarist Francis Marion was one of the key people involved in the alteration of Hawthorne's novel. A comic subplot was also added, yet McFarlane still feels that the "film can and does effect a transfer from, rather than a major transformation of, the original" (50). *Random Harvest*, based on the novel by James Hilton, is a different matter,

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in which "MGM, Freud and [the social values of] 1942" (71) are important factors in the intense restructuring of the original novel; still, McFarlane feels that "the film radically reorders the novel's plot while retaining much of its story "(73).

Novel to Film represents an interesting addition to work previously done in this area. In his methodology, McFarlane firmly distinguishes between what can be transferred from one medium to another successfully, and also explores the lines and limitations between literary theory and film theory. Specifically, McFarlane denotes the gap between systems of narrativity and systems of visual enunciation, especially as they are applied to film and literary texts. Thus McFarlane's approach, while seemingly more restrictive and in some ways more formal than that of George Bluestone, is nevertheless rigorously applied and original in its focus. Significantly, McFarlane sets out to "offer an alternative to the more subjective, impressionistic comparisons endemic in discussions on the phenomenology of adaptation"(vii). This new methodology is based on McFarlane's assumption that mainstream cinematic narrative owes much to the nineteenth-century novel, yet both narrative mediums must be approached differently.

While McFarlane's scope is focused on such fairly straightforward narrative films such as *Daisy Miller* and *Cape Fear*, the author is to be credited for forging a more precise and deconstructive analytical approach which is easily applied to such ambitiously postmodern films as *Romeo + Juliet*. Above all, it is the carefully detailed shot-by-shot analysis of the films at hand which makes McFarlane's work as a critic of literary theory and filmic adaptation so resonant and persuasive. Studies of films from novels often (consciously or unconsciously) elide both literary and film theories by drawing almost exclusively upon enunciation theory and other poststructural theories. In formulating and adhering to a significantly different methodological approach to adaptation, *Novel to Film* emerges as a significantly detailed and carefully considered study in an area in which much more remains to be written. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that McFarlane is at his best when discussing classical film/literary narratives, an area for which he obviously has a great deal of affection.

As a case in point, in his discussion of David Lean's film of Dickens's *Great Expectations*, McFarlane is particularly interested in the ways in which Lean deals with the problem of converting the novel's first-person narrative into a third-person structural format; he also persuasively examines Lean's successful attempt to "find a visual stylistic verve that may be compared to the novel's peculiar rhetorical power" (105). Similarly, Peter Bogdanovich's adaptation of *Daisy Miller* is seen by McFarlane as a successful transfer of source text to the screen, and he finds that the film remains true to James's novel in its "disruption of Winterbourne's complacency . . . its oppositions of place and person . . . [and] its contrasting sets of characters" (140-144). McFarlane also usefully points out that as a relatively short work of fiction, *Daisy Miller* needs no cutting to bring the scope of the action down to an acceptable screen running time. Finally, in his examination of John MacDonald's *The Executioners*, the source text for both the J. Lee Thompson and Scorsese versions of *Cape Fear*, McFarlane usefully notes that the filmic adaptation has almost entirely subsumed the novel itself; although the film preserves the straightforward exposition of the novel's narrative thrust, for all intents and purposes, the film has taken the place of the novel in the public's consciousness.

Detailed shot analyses from each of the films in question follow the individual essays discussing them; the text is meticulously edited, and offers a thorough bibliography and filmography. This text, in the paperback edition, should be of particular value in the classroom as a reliable and balanced discussion of the ways in which novels are predictably transformed into something altogether different as they make their way to the screen. I would recommend *Novel to Film* particularly for courses which deal with these novels (especially *Daisy Miller* and *Great Expectations*, where McFarlane's discussions are particularly rich) as a study which moves with great authority and assurance in matters both literary and filmic. *Novel to Film* achieves a carefully analytical and authoritatively substantive overview of the process of filmic adaptation which extends well beyond the examination of the key texts discussed here, and effectively examines both the mechanics and aesthetics of filmic adaptations of both classical and popular novels as a central aspect of contemporary and historical cinema practice.

■ Wheeler Winston Dixon's most recent book is *The Films of Jean-Luc Godard* (SUNY Press).

Rainer Werner Fassbinder

Edited by Laurence Kardish, in collaboration with Juliane Lorenz. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1997. $16.95.

This is one of the best texts available on the life and works of Rainer Werner Fassbinder, the remarkably prolific German filmmaker who died in 1982 at the age of 37, yet still completed 41 feature films and two shorts (plus an additional short, now lost) in a career that lasted 16 years. In addition to his work as a director and

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scenarist for his own films, Fassbinder also found the time to write plays and scripts for others, as well as acting in 40 films (some of his own; others by such New German Cinema luminaries as Jean-Marie Straub). As Juliane Lorenz, director of the Rainer Werner Fassbinder Foundation, comments, this is "126 hours of film—nonstop movies for five days and six hours" (8). Certainly Rainer Werner Fassbinder was a "speed artist": in 1969-70, he completed nine feature films for which he supplied both the scenarios and the direction; he shot one of his most famous films, *The Merchant of Four Seasons*, in a mere 11 days in 1971.

And yet for all the speed with which he completed his works, Fassbinder's style is both deliberate and elegiac; the fact that he often worked with the same crew members allowed him to work quickly but without compromise. One of the hallmarks of Fassbinder's cinema is the air of "time suspended" that informs the structure of his most accomplished films. *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1980), a 14-part miniseries Fassbinder completed only two years before his death, runs a staggering 933 minutes, relentlessly documenting the downward spiral of an ex-convict, Franz Biberkopf, who attempts to reform after his release from prison in the Germany of the late 1920s, only to be battered continually by the fates which conspire to destroy him. Nothing in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* seems hasty or careless; there is in every aspect of the film, and the rest of Fassbinder's work, a feeling of an inexorable accumulation of events, and a care and rigor in camera placement, lighting, and editing which is so transcendent as to be transparent, reminding one curiously enough of the cinema of Yasujiro Ozu. Cruel though Fassbinder's vision is, it is also seductive and contemplative.

Rainer Werner Fassbinder was written in conjunction with the first complete retrospective of Fassbinder's work ever undertaken; the Museum of Modern Art screened every film listed in this book in its original version. The book documents the filmmaker's extraordinary output in a series of essays and interviews by Laurence Kardish (who provides a comprehensive overview of Fassbinder's hectic career in his introductory essay to the volume), critic and historian Thomas Elsaesser, *Village Voice* critic Georgia Brown, as well as Fassbinder's colleagues Jeanne Moreau, Volker Schlöndorff, Wim Wenders, Hanna Schygulla, and others. Some of these texts have been previously published, but gathered together here they take on a new coherence, and form a cohesive commentary on Fassbinder's work. In addition, Ronald Magliozzi, Kardish, and Lorenz have compiled what must surely be considered the definitive filmography of Fassbinder's works, with complete cast, credits, running time and other pertinent information.

To complete the volume, we are treated to several texts by Fassbinder himself, including the director's curriculum vitae in his own words, an early piece of critical writing titled "Reflections of a Vertex" from 1959, an insightful and detailed interview with Christian Braad Thomsen from 1971, and a simultaneously hilarious and pathetic account by Hans Helmut Prinzler of Fassbinder's failed bid to enter the German Film and Television Academy in Berlin in 1966, complete with Fassbinder's writtten responses to the various required essay questions. The Academy found Fassbinder's written entrance exam "conscientious, but unfortunately not substantial." The 8mm film he made (now lost) as a part of the entrance exam was described with one word: "unsatisfactory" (84). Less than 3 years later, in April 1969, Fassbinder completed shooting on his first feature film, *Love Is Colder Than Death.*

What distinguishes Kardish and Lorenz's text from other works on Fassbinder is the variety of both critical and practical voices one finds within the pages of the book. Wolfram Schütte's essay, "The Forward Looking Traditionalist," examines Fassbinder's work within the theater, and his eventual move into television and film production, with both scholarly and critical precision; Schütte's perceptive remarks are augmented by the comments of cinematographer Michael Ballhaus, among others, who notes the practical/aesthetic considerations of shooting Fassbinder's film *Martha* (1973) with "one lens, without zoom . . . this restriction led to new ways of thinking about things and fresh experiments, and I noticed that because it was photographed this way, the film attained a strength and consistency we wouldn't have been able to achieve otherwise" (55).

Indeed, it is this "practicality" which is foregrounded throughout the text. Asked what he would do if he weren't able to make films, Fassbinder replies simply, "no idea." Fassbinder clearly saw work as a redemptive force, and the continual pull of film through the camera gave him a series of fresh challenges with each new film, in which his subject matter ranged from dystopian science fiction (*World on a Wire*, 1973), to teenage alienation (*Jail Bait*, 1972), the politics of film production (*Beware of a Holy Whore*, 1970), and the lack of solidarity and compassion within the gay community (*Fox and His Friends*, 1974), to cite only a few examples.

Like the work of Godard in the 1960s, every new film of Fassbinder's was distinctly unlike anything he had attempted before. Although Douglas Sirk is often cited as an influence on Fassbinder's work, it seems to me that these influences were nascent and fleeting; in everything he did, Fassbinder was reinventing both himself and the paradigms of cinematic narrative with each ambitious new project. Illustrated with numerous stills of Fassbinder at work, as well as production photographs and sections of holographic manuscripts of Fassbinder's numerous projects (some of them on hotel stationery;

Fassbinder seemed never to be able to stop thinking about what he would do with his next film or video), *Rainer Werner Fassbinder* is a text which is at once accessible and unpretentious, and which, through its use of fresh archival material and direct reminiscences, brings the reader/viewer directly into the orbit of Fassbinder's universe. *Rainer Werner Fassbinder* thus collects all of the filmmaker's prodigious output within the confines of one compact volume, and it would be an ideal companion piece for a course on Fassbinder, or for anyone who is interested in reading, writing, or researching the director's career.

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Spielberg's Holocaust

Critical Perspectives on *Schindler's List*

Edited by Yosefa Loshitzky. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997. $39.95 cloth; $17.95 paper.

After the disastrous failure of *Always* (1989), Steven Spielberg returned to the blockbusters which had won him early fortune and fame. *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989), *Hook* (1991), and *Jurassic Park* (1993) again married the spectacle of wretched excess to bathetic sentimentality, the cloying celebration of childhood innocence, and the implicit virtues of bourgeois family life. Dino-sized profits seemed to guarantee that more of the same would come.

The news that Spielberg's next picture would address the Holocaust caused a shudder of anticipatory schadenfreude in cynical Hollywood and critical circles. How would Auschwitz be fittingly rendered by the feel-good sensibility that had transformed *The Color Purple*'s incest-ridden, impoverished homestead into an absurdist rural paradise?

Confounding every expectation of disaster, *Schindler's List* (1995) was almost universally hailed for its stark illumination of the Holocaust. The film won Spielberg the nomination as a "serious" auteur which had for so long eluded him; he was also honored as a contemporary Resistance hero for opposing the native tide of forgetfulness and the vile insinuations of contemporary Holocaust revisionists. Parallels were drawn between the director and his subject, comparing Spielberg's own renascent Judaism with Schindler's awakening to a higher purpose.

Notwithstanding the acclaim accorded to *Schindler's List* and its creator, objections—sometimes rancorous—have increasingly been raised about the means and ends of Spielberg's enterprise. Fifty years after the event, popular conceptions of the Holocaust are more than ever filtered through media depictions. Despite honorable intentions, their inaccuracy and misplaced emphasis have been a source of considerable concern.

Schindler's List now bids fair to become the Holocaust's master narrative. In this context, it has been questioned whether public comprehension of Shoah should be culled from a commercial entertainment about the conversion of a womanizing petty Nazi entrepreneur into a righteous Gentile—and one who only rescued a paltry number of Jews. Would not the story of another, less equivocal—and Jewish—protagonist have comprised worthier testimony? And what of the millions who perished sans hope or rescue? Who shall speak for them a century from today, if Spielberg's cheering account of Schindler's metamorphosis eclipses other works? What methodology—cinematic, fictive, archival—is most apt to interpret the Holocaust? Who from high or popular culture is most suited to deploy, to critique these interpretations?

Yosefa Loshitzky, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Communiation and Journalism at Jerusalem's Hebrew University, has compiled a dozen essays which address virtually every aspect of the appropriateness, aesthetics, and reception of *Schindler's List*, as well as the problematizing of Holocaust remembrance in other venues. Unlike so many scattershot collections, the quality of the writing throughout *Spielberg's Holocaust* is uniformly high, the tone agreeably unpolemic in negotiating issues much marked and marred by acrimonious dispute.

Spielberg's Holocaust variously anatomizes and debates Spielberg's choice of Schindler as hero; *Schindler's List*'s emphasis upon the rescue of individual lives rather than the death of an entire people; its silence on the formidable assaults of the Holocaust upon traditional Jewish theological belief; its positioning of the viewer as compliant recipient of its historical and ideological viewpoints; its construction of the "Schindler Jews" as largely anonymous, passive ethnic stereotypes.

Beyond addressing specific problems, Loshitsky's anthology exhaustively interrogates the wholesale objection advanced in some quarters that Shoah constitutes such a catastrophic historical rupture as to situate it utterly beyond ordinary representation—especially beyond the conventions of classic narrative cinema to which *Schindler's List* adheres. According to the classic Hollywood mode, epic historical events are purveyed through their impact upon a tidy linear flow of personal/family experience towards an inevitably happy ending—in this case, the Schindler Jews' survival, articulated with the

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Spielberg's Holocaust variously anatomizes and debates Spielberg's choice of Schindler as hero; *Schindler's List*'s emphasis upon the rescue of individual lives rather than the death of an entire people; its silence on the formidable assaults of the Holocaust upon traditional Jewish theological belief; its positioning of the viewer as compliant recipient of its historical and ideological viewpoints; its construction of the "Schindler Jews" as largely anonymous, passive ethnic stereotypes.

Beyond addressing specific problems, Loshitsky's anthology exhaustively interrogates the wholesale objection advanced in some quarters that Shoah constitutes such a catastrophic historical rupture as to situate it utterly beyond ordinary representation—especially beyond the conventions of classic narrative cinema to which *Schindler's List* adheres. According to the classic Hollywood mode, epic historical events are purveyed through their impact upon a tidy linear flow of personal/family experience towards an inevitably happy ending—in this case, the Schindler Jews' survival, articulated with the

founding of the Jewish state as a bulwark against future genocides.

Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985) has been recommended by Spielberg's most vociferous critics (including Lanzmann himself) as a more "authentic" alternative to the supposed trivializing and debasing of the Holocaust into "Holocaust Park." Lanzmann's magisterial documentary famously eschews any representation whatsoever—archival or fictional—of Holocaust horror, instead foregrounding contemporary remembrances of victims, perpetrators, and bystanders.

Miriam Bratu Hansen's well-reasoned paper cautions against reading Lanzmann and Spielberg's work under the rubric of a simple binary opposition between fact and fiction. For Hansen, *Schindler's List* was implicitly undertaken "in defense of a capitalist culture, of an aesthetics that fuses modernist style, popular storytelling, and an ethos of individual responsibility." She rates Spielberg's narrativity toward these ends as far more sophisticated and complex than elsewhere in his oeuvre (indeed, the film embraces some of the very documentary tactics privileged by Lanzmann).

Hansen contends that *Shoah*'s undeniably powerful strategies do not render it any "purer," any more ethically and philosophically engaged, and thus more legitimate than *Schindler's List*. Such a claim echoes earlier attacks upon popular culture by a scornful and elitist intellectual establishment. The author warns that simplistically flogging the case for or against "showing" detracts from more nuanced, productive study of competing modes of Holocaust representation, high and low.

The "nonrepresentational, singular and hermetic *ecriture* of high modernism" which Hansen discerns in *Shoah* also informs *Night and Fog*'s (1955) potent visual equivalents to the terrifying silences, the hesitancies borne out of traumatized uncertainty which Paul Celan and Primo Levi deemed central signatures of survivor recollection. Bryan Cheyette's worthy essay proposes that Spielberg's meticulously recreated Holocaust ambience unfortunately forecloses possibilities of recuperating Levi's "grey zone" of fragmented survivor memory.

Spielberg's work often references other movies, particularly from his youth, and Loshitzky's contributors variously discuss the decisive influence of both formal devices and quotations from previous filmmaking upon the structure of *Schindler's List*. Spielberg for once has elected to efface the usual grandiose signatures of his presence. His allusions—including the crucial use of 40s expressionist/noirish black and white—are clearly pitched at a more European look, presumably in aid of garnering the cachet of artistic gravitas.

Like Truffaut, Spielberg has been totally immersed in cinema since childhood. Interviews indicate a penchant for viewing life experience as if through a Hollywood lens (e.g., a clash with his father at age eleven was "like the confrontation scene between Raymond Massey and James Dean in *East of Eden*" [1]). One's awareness of this Baudrillardian spin on reality lends a keener edge to Loshitzky's comment that *Schindler's List* chiefly mediates the Holocaust "through the imaginary collective memory of the movies." I submit that the plethora of allusion paradoxically serves to undermine the unassailable authenticity Spielberg hoped to achieve.

A quartet of provocative papers delineates how the divergent cultural conditions and *mentalites* of four major nations affected each's reception of *Schindler's List*. Jeffrey Shandler demonstrates that the film's enthusiastic American welcome was the culmination of mounting interest in the Holocaust over the past two decades. Increased visits to European Holocaust locales and involvement with their preservation has been paralleled by the extensive construction of "virtual" Holocaust sites in United States memorials and museums.

Liliane Weissberg ascribes *Schindler's List*'s substantial German success to its fortuitous arrival at a time when the country was particularly preoccupied with mourning and atonement for the ruinous Nazi past. Schindler's status as "good German" offered heady possibilities for identification. Spielberg was doubly lauded as a Jew of German extraction who had valorized an Aryan icon of national rehabilitation.

Natasha Lehrer asserts that circumstances in France made for a far less felicitous appraisal of the film and its creator. *Schindler's List* opened just as the Touvier affair was spurring a wrenching, frequently ambivalent reappraisal of Vichy's active role as well as quotidian passive compliance in the deportation of Jewish citizens. The memory politics of the day did not stir a general move towards guilty atonement as in Germany. French art cinema had profoundly probed the Holocaust and "bad faith" during the Occupation before, with *Night and Fog* and *The Sorrow and the Pity* (1971); *Lacombe Lucien* (1974); *The Memory of Justice* (1986); *Au revoir les enfants* (1987). The left had already rated *Shoah* as the most authoritative film text on the subject to date. In the prevailing artistic and political context, *Schindler's List* was often savaged as the vacuous endeavor of a Hollywood lightweight to create facile closure where none could (or should) exist.

Surprisingly enough, *Schindler's List* also met with abundant disapproval in Israel. Haim Breesheth's fascinating account shows that the Jewish homeland had been wrestling with profound ambivalence toward Holocaust survivors for decades. Israeli disdain for the perceived wholesale passivity of Diaspora Jews hearkened back to the pre-World War II period, ripening into outright anger after the achievement of statehood at bloody expense. Jewish resistance was canonized, implicitly identified

with Israeli militance, while ordinary survivors lived on in silent shame.

The Eichmann trial precipitated a crucial turning point in the trajectory of Israeli memory politics. Vindication of the survivors, together with renewed interest in pre-war European Jewish life engendered intense feelings of Hebraic proprietorship of the Holocaust: Israel had come to believe that it owned Shoah. From this perspective it was inevitable that *Schindler's List* should be rated a kitsch-ridden bathetic catastrophe, its director deemed a crass interloper who was bent on hijacking the Holocaust to the United States—for Israel, a perennial source of sustenance and suspicion—and to his own immense gain. "Spielberg needs the Holocaust," wrote a caustic Tom Segev, " but the Holocaust does not need Spielberg." [2]

One may object that *Spielberg's Holocaust* provides little in-depth formal analysis of a film which, despite many other difficulties, is extraordinarily well crafted. But it may justifiably be argued that such an investigation lay outside the editor's ideological/historicist agenda. Her superb collection provides generous enlightenment on the complex problems attendant upon every attempt to embody the Holocaust. One commends the pluralistic perspective which permits room for Spielberg's passionate, if flawed devotion to traditional mimesis and Lanzmann's summary refusal of the catastrophic image, as well as the host of other possibilities. We have need of them all.

■ Harvey Greenberg is the author of *Screen Memories: Hollywood Cinema on the Psychoanalytic Couch.*

1. Steven Spielberg, as quoted in "The Autobiography of Peter Pan," *Time* Magazine, 15 July, 1985, p. 62.
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Television in America

Local Station History from Across the Nation

Edited by Michael D. Murray and Donald G. Godfrey. Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1997. $42.95.

Here is a book we have long needed. There are any number of tomes dealing with the rise and fall of the major networks. *Television in America* presents the first book-length collection of essays of histories of local stations. Twenty-two academics deal with operations of all sizes—from East Coast giants such as WABC in New York to tiny KTVA in Anchorage, Alaska, where it was not until 1970 that network programs were actually aired the same time as their presentation in the lower 48, not two weeks later.

The editors, professors of communication at the University of Missouri-St. Louis (who contributes an essay on KSD of St. Louis), and the University of Arizona (who co-authors a contribution on KSL of Salt Lake City), have happily gone beyond the usual clichés about Edward R. Murrow and company, and begun to explore the impact of television in 1950s United States. Stations in the East and South add up to ten essays and constitute the first half of the text. Midwestern stations—such as WBBM in Chicago and WCCO in Minneapolis—contribute six more essays, and the far West a dozen more, with Los Angeles as the only market rating two essays.

Television in America is well documented, and its extensive bibliography and a 15-page introduction should be read by all students of TV history. The book's greatest accomplishment comes with its fortitude and vision to seek to shift the focus from the usual "top down" histories to an approach where one starts the process of doing history from the "bottom up." It presents a strong antidote to the dozens of network-centric histories of television that clog today's shelves.

Yet problems come with the execution. For example, the book contains no photographs and they are sorely missed, because only a handful of readers will have seen the pioneering programs discussed—and they may hardly remember them. A videotape, as hard as one might be to assemble and distribute, would have been an invaluable companion piece.

The selection of the 22 stations to be analyzed seems random at best. The book is not organized to cover the biggest U.S. cities: such important markets as Detroit, Dallas, Houston, Boston, and Baltimore are missing altogether, while 1950s small towns such as Orlando, Florida, and Lubbock, Texas, are treated. The editors seemed to have included those places where writers had collected enough material to pen an essay. *Television in America* would have been so much better had it systematically set up some criteria—all the biggest TV markets, a stratified sample of markets, or a set of typical markets—rather than implying in the table of contents that this book systematically and logically covers all regions of the United States.

A far more serious weakness comes with the historical method used, which is by and large biographical. Over and over we read of some great man who was foresighted enough to built the first TV station in his city. Missing are all sorts of fascinating questions about the cultural, social, and economic factors that defined and constrained the coming of television to the United States. Biography may enable one to cleverly and amusingly slip over the difficult and vexing questions of "contem-

with Israeli militance, while ordinary survivors lived on in silent shame.

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porary historical analysis," but in the end *Television in America* simply replaces one set of heros (local businessmen) for the usual network suspects of David Sarnoff (NBC), Leonard Goldenson (ABC), and William Paley (CBS).

Murray and Godfrey are right to insist that we need to continue to ask questions about local television, but judging from the experience of *Television in America*, we need to abandon the biographical method. Let me suggest one alternative. Urban historians can teach us much. Since TV markets are positioned in and blanket urban communities because of FCC design, the revitalization of TV history surely could begin by following the lead of Sam Bass Warner, who simply asked in his now classic and highly influential plea for historiographic change: "If the World Were Philadelphia: A Scaffolding for Urban History."

I am not suggesting that urban history is the only way to go, but surely takes us past all the familiar pitfalls of biographically generated surveys. As Lynn Spigel and her colleagues have shown us with their path-breaking work, this historical project is at the core of understanding the development of the American Century. But because change from 1946 to 1958 was so rapid, this task will surely not be easy. For example, in Washington, D.C., when its first experimental station W3XWT began transmissions for a couple of hours a day in 1946, there were only 150 sets in the entire city. By 1958, twelve years later, few households did not have a set, and the universality of the television experience commenced. A new historical era had begun.

This task of writing the history of television's coming in the United States is vital and imposing. We should not lament that surviving artifacts are few, and that pioneers who are interviewed confront anyone daring to go past their closely held nostalgic renderings. *Television in America* should inspire us to begin to completely rethink, as cinema historians did a generation ago, the complete landscape of the innovation and diffusion of the most important mass medium of the second half of the twentieth century.

■ Douglas Gomery teaches at the University of Maryland.

Televisuality

Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television

By John Thornton Caldwell. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1995. $55.00 cloth; $20.00 paper.

John Thornton Caldwell has a paradigmatic bone to pick with what he calls the "high theory" of television and film studies. Specifically, he feels that academic studies of television have mostly ignored or misunderstood the aesthetic dimensions of television, especially television since the 1980s. As argued in his book *Televisuality*, television should not be seen as a visually simplistic medium. Instead, TV is better understood as a self-consciously stylistic medium, one that explicitly makes artistic choices and requires a new academic perspective and vocabulary to understand the ideological and aesthetic subtleties of its visual dynamics.

The 1980s were a watershed decade in the aestheticization of TV visuals, Caldwell notes, because during this time new digital techniques allowed more creative video manipulation and economic competition from cable and shocked the Big Three U.S. TV networks out of their creative complacency. Since then, viewers have been exposed to visually cluttered shows like "Pee-Wee's Playhouse," visually seamless commercials featuring the dead Fred Astaire dancing with commercially vibrant vacuum cleaners, visually spectacular miniseries such as 1997's $32 million epic *The Odyssey*, and visually obsessed news reports like those covering the L.A. riots or, later, O.J. Simpson's Bronco chase. Caldwell recognizes the ideological as well as aesthetic complexity of this new style of "televisuality," and he feels scholars, chained by scholarly preconceptions of television developed before the 1980s, will be ill-prepared to comprehend television's new visual sophistication.

The book is made up of three sections. In the first section, the author lays out the basic perspective of televisuality and how it developed. He argues that visual elements now preoccupy the industry's definition of "quality TV" much more than before the 1980s, and he explores the influence of film and TV commercials on the look of television programming. The second section discusses the different genres of televisuality that have developed. Because Caldwell argues that televisuality has its origins more in economic tensions than in aesthetic genius, he labels each televisual genre with its own economic metaphor. Thus, for example, the "boutique" style of televisuality stresses the unique look of a program influenced by/hyped as an individual creator's vision. "Loss Leaders," on the other hand, are prestige programs—miniseries, movies of the week—that may

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individually lose money for networks but still have promotional advantages that outweigh the deficit, much like a retailer who marks down one popular item below cost to bring customers in to shop. In the final section, he discusses the nature of the televisual audience (and how the industry theorizes this audience), the economics of televisuality (including its future appeals given recent industry trends like conglomeratization), and televisual politics, using the Rodney King trial and the resulting social protest as a case study. Finally, he makes a persuasive case about the barriers that exist to an increased intensification of the scholarly study of visuals, including territorial, theoretical, and legal barriers—the last involving the decrease of fair use as media organizations protect their copyrighted images.

Much of *Televisuality* is engrossing and thought-provoking. Caldwell is correct in saying that TV is more visually sophisticated than in its early years, and perhaps this should encourage scholars to retheorize television. And individual sections are often very good. Especially interesting is Chapter 4, which looks at the visual manipulations that occur when theatrical films are adapted for television. As the author argues, usually critics think of television adaptation of film as a subtracting process. Dirty words, sex, and excess blood are removed from the film to sanction it as "edited for television" and the edges cut off to fit TV's screen ratio. But Caldwell argues that, with TV's digital sophistication, this adaptation process is much more of a textual additive process. TV adds promos for the movie, inserts promos for other programs during the movie, builds news tie-ins, and of course fills the broadcast with product commercials. Such elements, he notes, often have ideological implications, such as psychologizing and "auteurizing" the film text, thus in turn depoliticizing it.

A few minor complaints could be aired about *Televisuality*. The author discusses so many different televisual issues with so many different perspectives—technological, aesthetic, economic, ideological—that some sections seem underdeveloped, such as his musings about the ideological implications of over-aestheticizing certain types of television, at the end of Chapter 3. Likewise, although *Televisuality* is often persuasive, there is still some doubt that television is aestheticized to the degree the book claims. It sometimes appears the book is focusing on exceptions rather than rules. The section on how the discourse of some television shows have historically discussed aesthetics in Chapter 2 is not convincingly representative. More recently, the "zero-degree," visually bland sitcom is still the work-horse of prime time (18 sitcoms for the 1997-98 season on NBC alone); the aesthetically mundane talk show still dominates daytime. And predictions about future incentives for televisuality may not hold. Caldwell argues that as ancillary rights have become more important, televisuality-based programs like "Miami Vice" will live on in cable. Networks, then, are encouraged to create such shows because of this financial afterlife potential. But with the death of the Financial Interest and Syndication Rules, which blocked network ownership of programs, the networks now have an incentive to produce programs for local broadcast stations in syndication, which is more lucrative than cable rights. Traditionally, visually uninteresting (and therefore more timeless) situation comedies are the most syndication-friendly, off-network type of program for local stations.

Nevertheless, these are minor quibbles; *Televisuality* points to a hole in television studies and highlights an interdisciplinary approach—combining the economic with the aesthetic and ideological—that could help to plug it.

■ Matthew P. McAllister teaches in the Department of Communication Studies at Virginia Tech.

Women Filmmakers of the African and Asian Diaspora

Decolonizing the Gaze, Locating Subjectivity

By Gwendolyn Audrey Foster. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1997. $39.95 cloth; $19.95 paper.

Gwendolyn Audrey Foster's *Women Filmmakers of the African and Asian Diaspora* is one of the first single-authored texts that provides a detailed examination of the works of six contemporary black and Asian women filmmakers. The importance of this book is in Foster's selection of gay and heterosexual women filmmakers who are crossing more than racial and or sexual borders. In such a representative selection, she not only acknowledges how these women might make use of their racial-ethnic experiences in predominantly European sociocultural environments, but, in both her interpretations of selected films and her balanced choice of critical references, shows how these filmmakers use their gender and sexual orientation as important resources in the making of their respective films.

Moreover, and of major importance to the development of feminist film criticism, Foster's critical essays about the films of these six women offer feminist film studies an innovative critical methodology. In borrowing from the critical and theoretical works of women of color, it strategically avoids many of the Eurocentric pit-

individually lose money for networks but still have promotional advantages that outweigh the deficit, much like a retailer who marks down one popular item below cost to bring customers in to shop. In the final section, he discusses the nature of the televisual audience (and how the industry theorizes this audience), the economics of televisuality (including its future appeals given recent industry trends like conglomeratization), and televisual politics, using the Rodney King trial and the resulting social protest as a case study. Finally, he makes a persuasive case about the barriers that exist to an increased intensification of the scholarly study of visuals, including territorial, theoretical, and legal barriers—the last involving the decrease of fair use as media organizations protect their copyrighted images.

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Moreover, and of major importance to the development of feminist film criticism, Foster's critical essays about the films of these six women offer feminist film studies an innovative critical methodology. In borrowing from the critical and theoretical works of women of color, it strategically avoids many of the Eurocentric pit-

falls that have hampered (and continue to hamper) film scholars and students who unwittingly ignore or avoid writings by film scholars of color who have pioneered the serious study of African and Asian diasporic filmmakers. Foster's book does not make acknowledging these other(ed) critics merely a politically correct gesture only to have them disappear two or three pages into her study. Rather, she selectively borrows from the insights of certain women of color and adds her own insightful interpretations to the works of such women filmmakers as Zeinabu irene Davis, Ngozi Onwurah, Julie Dash, Pratibha Parmar, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Mira Nair.

Women Filmmakers is organized in eight chapters and begins with an introductory chapter that briefly charts a history of the earliest filmmaking efforts of such African-American women as Eloise Gist, a contemporary of Oscar Micheaux, Lita Lawrence, who directed *Motherhood: Life's Greatest Miracle* (1927), and the novelist, dramatist, essayist, and documentary filmmaker Zora Neale Hurston, a renaissance woman who was scorned by many of her African-American male contemporaries. In this first chapter, Foster moves from these womanist pioneers and maps out a critical position from which she will discuss certain African and Asian diasporic filmmakers. First, she acknowledges that the two terms African diaspora and Asian diaspora "should not be taken to imply some utopian definition of essentialist, totalized groups or identities." Foster acknowledges that many of her selected filmmakers have positions within, outside, and at the borders of such positions as their diaspora and gender would seem to confine them. Here, she wisely indicates that various nodes of identity positions as race, class, gender, sexuality, and religion are inhabited by any one of her selected women filmmakers and/or videographers who are discussed in the chapters that follow. In each of the subsequent five chapters, Foster focuses on the films and/or videos of a female artist of color.

Chapter 2 features a discussion of Zeinabu irene Davis. Chapter 3 focuses on the Afro-British filmmaker Ngozi Onwurah. Chapter 4 takes up Julie Dash's masterpiece *Daughters of the Dust* (1991) and its challenge to all previous and present Hollywood depictions by screening African-American history through a woman-centered lens.

Although Foster's book predates Steven Speilberg's *Amistad* (1997), her discussion of Dash's womanist subject matter and non-classical Hollywood narrative technique—a visual Afrocentric magical realism—has relevance to this film. *Daughters of the Dust* and Haile Gerima's *Sankofa* (1994) most certainly influenced *Amistad*'s visual style, especially the trans-Atlantic slave trade scenes. Moreover, and quite unfortunately, Dash's pioneering cinematic depiction of black womanhood most certainly indicates Hollywood's resistance to fully incorporating black women into its historical frames—most evident in *Amistad*'s homosocial interracial narrative. True, Foster does not move in the critical manner that I suggest, but she provides the reader with sufficient information that indicates the shortcomings of such grand epics. *Amistad* celebrates an abolitionist movement in which the participation of women is practically absent.

In the next three chapters, Fosters turns her attention to the work of Asian filmmakers who either live in Britain or the United States. The work of Pratibha Parmar, a Kenyan-born Indian of British citizenship, is presented as an example of a film and video praxis that resists homophobia, racism, and sexism. Foster finds that Parmar "was able to move across borders of prescribed identity politics only after she began to question the reinforcement of proscribed 'territories' determined by essentialist fixed identity tags" (74). This non-essentialist philosophical stance prevails throughout Foster's book as she discusses women filmmakers of the African and Asian diaspora.

Prudently, and avoiding the colonizing theoretical traps that befall many well-meaning feminists and white film critics, Foster uses the words of these filmmakers of color to underline their non-essentialist ideology which reflects a womanist politics. For instance, she quotes from Pratibha Parmar's rhetorical self-examination: "What was I, an Asian lesbian, doing making a video about AIDS that did not have just Black women's voices, but also the voices of Black and white men? Why had I dared to cross the boundaries of race and gender? Underlying this criticism was the idea that as an Asian lesbian filmmaker, my territory should be proscribed and limited to my very specific identities, and to my 'own' communities" (74). Chapters 6 and 7 cover the work of Vietnamese-born Trinh T. Minh-ha and Indian-born Mira Nair. Both filmmakers were educated and reside in the United States.

The eighth and final chapter, "Other Voices," covers the work of several women of color. Unlike the previous chapters, this section provides a brief listing of their films and videos. Foster's intentions here are to indicate her awareness of the importance of those "Other Voices" that make up the women filmmakers of the African and Asian diaspora. This book sheds a necessary light on women filmmakers and videographers whose existence and works have been overlooked in previous book-length studies of women filmmakers, providing a historical and critical space where women of color as artists are discussed and as theorists are heard.

Foster guides feminist film criticism across the murky white waters of Eurocentrism, building up a non-essentialist critical praxis that acknowledges the many

other transnational voices of race, sex, gender, and class. Foster's book unthinks Eurocentrism by dismantling the generation of an exclusively white critical voice that speaks about, rather than with, the rainbow community that includes Europeans. This unthinking of Eurocentrism is not exclusively constructed by theoretical and critical white voices that speak over the black, brown, red, and yellow faces that constitute a large part of this post-negritude world.

■ Mark A. Reid is the author of *Redefining Black Film* (1993), *Post-Negritude Visual and Literary Culture* (1997) and the editor of *Spike Lee's* Do the Right Thing (1997).

World Cinema—Israel

By Amy Kronish. Cranbury, N.J.: Associated University Presses, 1996. $38.50.

This book on Israeli cinema by an Israeli film historian is a valuable and original piece of scholarship; its most important feature is an exhaustive filmography listing credits, in Hebrew and English, for several hundred Israeli feature and documentary films.[1] The main body of the text also includes useful discussion of the development of Israeli film production structures and the operation of state subsidies for "quality" film making. As far as the actual analysis of films is concerned, the strongest and most engaging section is a chapter on the representation of women within Israeli cinema and the work of women filmmakers such as Michal Bat-Adam. This section stands out in a book which otherwise strives, within the framework of twelve thematically organised chapters, for comprehensiveness rather than detailed analysis of individual films. *World Cinema—Israel* offers a potted history and overview which eschews any sustained attempt to theorize the development of Israeli cinema or to explore the underlying political implications of its major genres and tendencies. On one level, a survey format is appropriate for a book which clearly and successfully presents itself as a piece of readable, well-researched scholarship dealing with a subject relatively unfamiliar to British and American readers. On another level, this apparently commonsensical approach to an introduction to Israeli cinema obscures the book's adherence to a particular understanding both of Israeli history and of the relationship between that history and Israeli national cinema.

Kronish writes from a mainstream liberal Zionist standpoint (albeit with a feminist inflection), but without openly declaring this as such. Tellingly, she makes few references within the main body of the text to Ella Shohat's Israeli *Cinema: East/West and the Politics of Representation* (1989), the one major English-language publication on this subject prior to Kronish's. The recent translation of Shohat's work into Hebrew has explicitly raised the political stakes in discussions of Israeli cinema within Israel itself by foregrounding issues of Sephardi and Palestinian representation. Kronish's brief reference to Shohat's book marginalizes it as a "radical political analysis" (vi), implying that her own is a more objective, level-headed account. Her work does not, however, inhabit a neutral position above the fray. Barely acknowledging contemporary debates within Palestinian and Israeli historiography, Kronish's book hinges its account of Israeli cinema's development around a seemingly straightforward but in fact highly contentious, mythologized reading of Israeli history. The nation's history is narrated as a march toward increasing progress, security, and democracy. To cite just one example of the kind of judgement this produces, the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon is presented solely as a justified response to "terrorist" activity (111). At the very least, this is a debatable assertion.

This reductive, univocal historiographical underpinning is allied to a vague, untheorized assumption that Israeli cinema is more or less directly reflective of broad shifts in the nation's cultural "mood." Kronish's work lacks the nuanced sense of mediated causality which much contemporary writing on film history takes as its basic point of departure. Specific films are seen as expressions of a generalised Zeitgeist rather than as interventions into a fractured cultural field characterised as much by conflict and fragmentation as by attempts to construct national unity. Kronish's book is itself an intervention which narrativizes Israeli cinema history as a coherent and linear story rather than reading the films in relation to potential points of cultural dissonance. *World Cinema—Israel* posits Israeli culture as basically homogeneous, and cinema as a reflection of various aspects of this fundamental homogeneity. Even the short chapter which surveys recent Israeli films concerned with the search for ethnic roots ultimately reasserts this assumed unity. The chapter concludes by effectively closing down the complex issues of personal identity and community affiliation raised, at least incipiently, by some of these films' nostalgia for positive elements of Jewish life in the diaspora. Kronish's account subsumes them all as cultural expressions of a "proud pluralistic society . . . which [can] cope with both the cultural differences and the commonalities among the various ethnic groups" (171). In other words, her interpretation admits no significant deviation from the benign version of the Zionist master narrative which structures the book as a whole.

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The seamless incorporation of Israeli film history into a teleological schema in *World Cinema—Israel* is reinforced by the fact that the book rarely offers any close analysis of film texts. Little attention is paid to the ways in which cinematic strategies (narrative structure, editing, shot composition, casting, performance, etc.) mobilized within the films might work to support, contest, or redefine wider ideological frameworks for understanding Israeli history and constructing Israeli subjectivities. Kronish opts instead for plot summaries plus enthusiasm. Films are described as "exciting" or "authentic" without any more searching analysis of what the ideological implications of such immediate and uncritical emotional engagement might be, and without any consideration of whether such responses would necessarily be shared by spectators occupying cultural locations different from the author's. Israeli cinema, like Israeli history, is seen as part of a natural process of organic evolution towards increasing sophistication, confidence, balanced diversity, and maturity.

World Cinema—Israel is, like Shohat's book, an initial mapping of the field. It therefore understandably limits its focus to the traditional object of study for histories of national cinemas: films produced within the nation-state. There are however several issues which future discussions of Israeli film culture could elaborate more fully. One of these is cinema's strategic position in relation to the rest of Israeli audiovisual culture. Even though Israeli television was not established until the late 1960s, the traditional mode of consuming films in the cinema has long since become, as in most other industrialized societies, a minority activity. Nevertheless, "quality" Israeli filmmaking, state-subsided and aesthetically validated by film critics, generally carries more prestige than television programming, as well as a potentially international profile. Consequently, such films can on occasion spark or crystallize debates which proliferate throughout Israeli culture through media coverage and formal and informal discussion. At the same time, it should be noted that many right-wing and religious participants in these debates tend to dismiss Israeli cinema in toto as a haven for leftist intellectuals; another reason why Kronish's assumption about Israeli films expressing aspects of a basic cultural unity is questionable.

World Cinema—Israel's conventional focus on cinematic exhibition of films produced within the nation-state also occludes two other issues. The first is the significance for questions of national identity of other, non-Israeli films circulating within various channels of distribution and exhibition. What role have Hollywood films played within Israeli film history and cultural self-definition? Perhaps even more importantly in the context of current political and economic reconfigurations, what about private consumption of Arab films on video and via Arab and Israeli television broadcasts, particularly for Sephardi communities within Israel? Kronish's book, like many other histories of national cinemas, quietly assumes a centrality for Israeli film production as the privileged object of critical attention. In fact, these films may only have played a subsidiary or intermittently important role within the actual histories of various Israeli communities' patterns of filmic consumption.

Given that the crucial dimensions of everyday experience, leisure, and popular culture in Palestine-Israel sometimes tend to be overlooked in favor of more hard-headed economic, sociological, and political analyses, any book on Israeli cinema, whatever its standpoint, is a welcome addition to an important discussion. *World Cinema—Israel* contains a substantial amount of clearly presented empirical material hitherto unavailable in English. It also provides a submerged yet strident historical thesis which needs to be assessed with a cautious, critical eye. Kronish's book is most profitably read alongside Shohat's earlier work on the same subject. Taken together, these texts illuminate each other by offering insights into different aspects of the contest over Israeli self-definition currently being played out within Israeli film culture.

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Drummond introduces his study of *High Noon* with backgrounds for the writer, producer, and stars. Stanley Kramer broke with Carl Foreman, its writer, and, in another context, director Joseph Losey, both for their encounters with HUAC. Drummond recalls *High Noon*'s intertextual relationships with other films. It's odd that in a section termed "Femininities" he neglects obvious comparisons between a scene from *The Virginian* and one in *High Noon*. In each one, Gary Cooper tells the girl he must do what a man's gotta do. In terms of each couple's behavior, they're mirror opposites.

All the monographs outline production details that shape a film. To a greater or less extent each writer fills in cultural contexts. Both approaches underscore our interest in how resolutions are effected. All the confrontations enlist melodrama, although their value systems vary. *Blue Velvet*'s conflict is oedipal, resolved with a surrogate father/son shootout. *The Thing* juxtaposes humans and aliens, ending with a suspicious standoff between two survivors. In a director's cut release, the apparent meaning of *Blade Runner* was reversed when a noir first-person narration was dropped. With a growing audience suspicion that Deckhard, the protagonist, may himself have been a replicant, the issue of humanness is cast onto broader, less resolvable planes. *The Right Stuff* is built around macho matters of proving oneself worthy or wanting. By crosscutting Chuck Yeager's second airspeed jet flight against a soaring space capsule, the astronauts' courage is equated through association by contiguity. In *The Crying Game*, Fergus ends behind prison bars, repeating an ironic parable to his transvestite friend Dill. Its point is that life consists of givers and takers. Their nonsexual relationship is grounded in giving. *High Noon* tells a story of reformation and deformation. Through lack of will, the people of Hadleyville have insured their town's demise.

JOHN FELL

Bresson, Robert. *Notes on the Cinematographer*. Copenhagen: Green Integer, 1997. Distributed by Sun & Moon Press. $8.95. With the number of Robert Bresson's films available on video happily having significantly increased in the past few years, it is particularly appropriate that the English translation of his *Notes sur le Cinematographe* is now back in print. "Not to shoot a film in order to illustrate a thesis, or to display men and women confined to their external aspect, but to discover the matter thay are made of. To attain that 'heart of the heart' which does not let itself be caught either by poetry, or by philosophy, or by drama."

That is actually one of the longer entries in this gnomic volume. The notes are informative and also suggestive glimpses into the "heart of the heart" of Bresson as filmmaker. Through them the reader sees his commitment to catch the ineffable through the presentation of unadorned images without any falsifying or interpretive devices such as acting, mood music, or expressive camera work. One also learns of both the passion and the logic behind his rigorous formalism. What also becomes evident is his high esteem for, and confidence in, the film medium, as when he refers to the camera and tape recorder as "the two sublime machines I use for my work." Yet Bresson also expresses rejection of, even revulsion toward, most films because they deform, rather than respect and explore, reality, and seek to use meretricious images to assault and manipulate the audience. Bresson, by contrast, makes films that draw the viewer into the images, and thus more deeply into reality: "Your film is not made for a stroll with the eyes, but for going right into, for being totally absorbed in."

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films. Just as Bresson's films lead the receptive viewer to a contemplation of reality, so these notes lead one to reflect on the marvellous artistry that, seemingly paradoxically, uses a materialist method of great purity to create films of such profundity, interiority, and mystery that most others seem, by comparison, so garishly superficial as to be almost immoral.

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McFarlane, Brian. *An Autobiography of British Cinema*. New York: Methuen/Random House/BFI, 1997. $30.00. This is an indispensable guide to the filmmakers, performers, and producers who made up the British film industry. For the most part, *An Autobiography of British Cinema* is a series of interviews in which McFarlane chats with Lindsay Anderson, Sir Dirk Bogarde, Sir John Gielgud, Kenneth Branagh, Moira Shearer, David Lean, Derek Jarman, Julie Christie (who also contributes an introduction to the volume), and more than 180 members of the British filmmaking community, all of whom are remarkably candid and forthcoming in their reminiscences. McFarlane decisively rejects the "Golden Age" theory of British cinema, which holds that the 30s to the 50s were the most prolific and influential period of film production in the U.K., and carries his text up to the present, ending with an interview with Anthony Minghella. He has a knack for dragging out surprising bits of information and insight from his subjects: Sir Dirk Bogarde's comments on the "hallucinogenic" production atmosphere of *The Servant*, Nicolas Roeg's thoughts on working with Donald Cammel on *Performance*, Herbert Lom's fond appreciation of his continuing role as the bumbling chief inspector in the long-running "Pink Panther" series, Peter Greenaway's uneasy truce with the British cinematic establishment over the course of his still evolving career, Peter Rogers discussing the long string of "Carry On" films which brought in excellent box-office returns, if not rave reviews from the critics, and Sir Alec Guinness discussing the production of *The Lavender Hill Mob* with both detail and detachment. The book includes so many figures, from composer/conductor Muir Mathieson to contemporary cineaste Sally Potter to "B" program director Francis Searle that the reader can become transfixed by the hundreds of intertwining and often delightfully conflicting narratives. It also has a complete list of credits for each person covered, as well as an individual bibliography for each artist, a summary bibliography at the end of the work, and a thoroughly detailed index.

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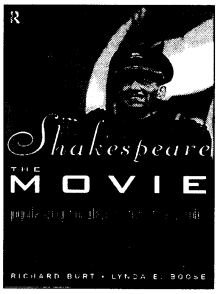

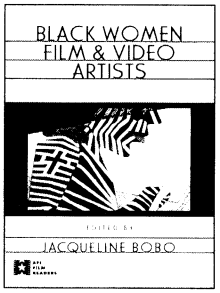

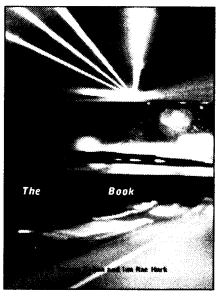

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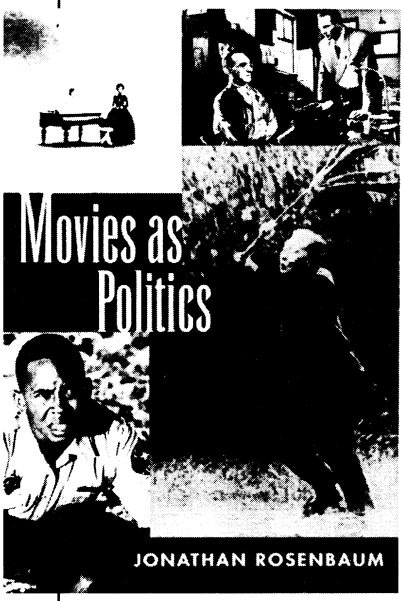

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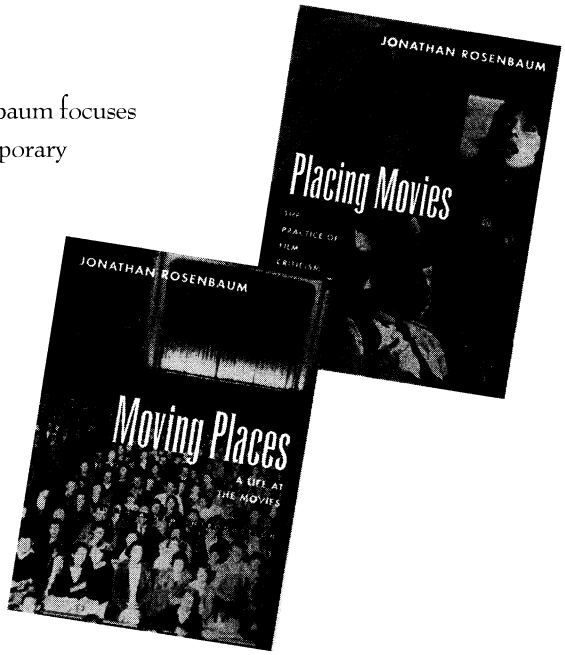

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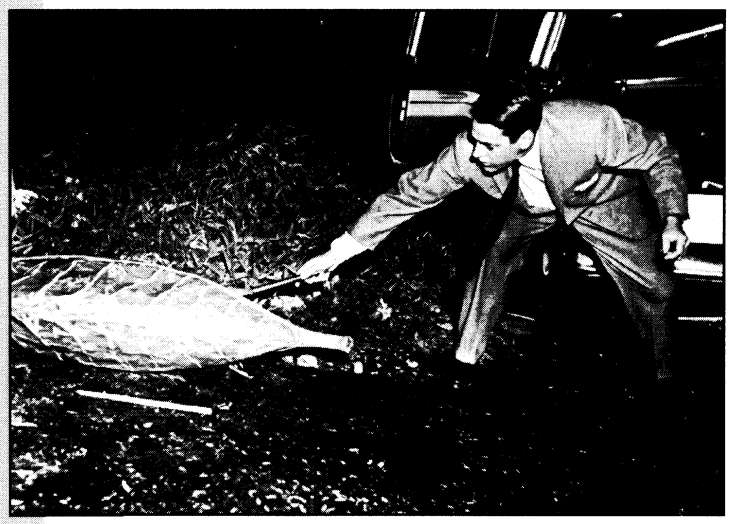

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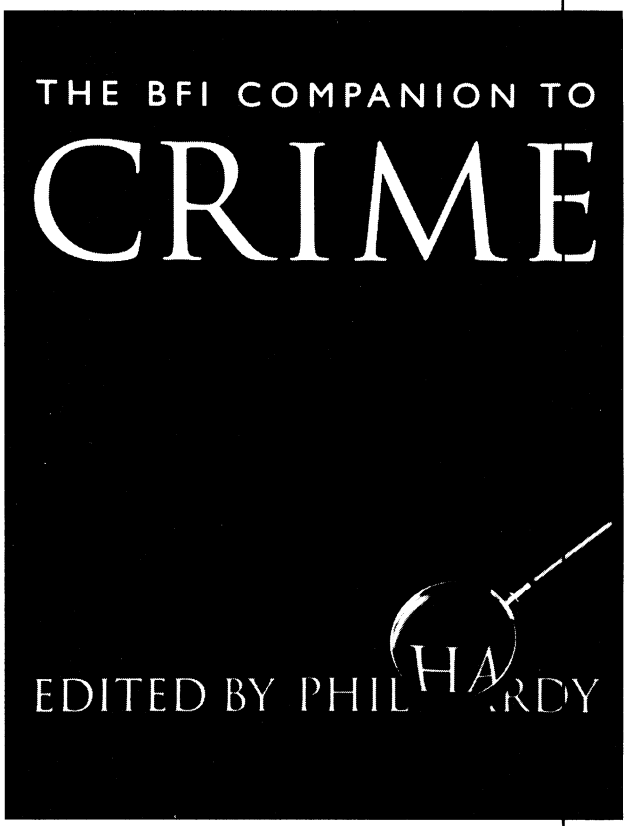

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